ALL THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEN

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Preface

"Why do you want to write about small people?" Romesh Thapar, the distinguished Editor of *Seminar*, asked me when I had just set out to gather material for the book I had liked that There were better men one could write about, even the story of a man toiling in the fields would perhaps be more worthwhile or, at any rate, pleasanter to write

None of the characters who occupy these pages has done anything great and virtuous to deserve the flood of books written on them And yet there is a good reason to write about them, particularly because they are "small people" For, these were the men—and women—who came to preside over the destinies of this great country, the people who almost succeeded in destroying all the values that they swore by And we, the people of India, let them do it We, too, are the guilty ones If we are to save ourselves from going under again, we must realize our own guilt, we must know the faces that committed the ugly assault on the human spirit

George Fernandes was absolutely right when he said, recently, that we had "got off the hook very cheap" Most of us paid almost no price for regaining our liberties Most of us still do not know what we owe to the few who suffered and died so that we remain free

Though the nightmare is over, the dark forces still linger It is not only that the people who did it to us are still very much

there, it need not be them again Unless we learn our lessons from the past, it could be other faces who may do the same, or worse It is time, perhaps, to know who is who It is certainly time to know the real enemy One need not wait for the final judgments, that is merely being legalistic Often, the people's instinctive judgments are more right than the verdict of courts

After the traumatic elections of March 1977, I had been toying with the idea of doing something very different—a small book on the "victims," among whom were the nameless ones who had suffered and died for us That, I thought, was the least I could do to expiate my own sins It was a debt I owed to myself That was the project I had been discussing with a close friend when I suddenly saw a new glimmer in his eyes "I have another idea for you," he said "Why don't you first write on all the Prime Minister's men?" He was gushing with infectious enthusiasm He had even named the title!

I had no idea, then, of what I was up against, no idea of the number of doors that would be slammed in my face, the number of people who would bang their telephones before I could explain myself I had not realized how much fear was still abroad among the people "I have nothing to say," came the voice of one of the principals of the morbid drama, before the line snapped I thought he was being arrogant or nasty, but as I soon found he was only jittery They all seemed frightened, but none was repentant!

Surprisingly, it was the lesser characters who were more willing to talk But they didn't have much truth to tell And interviews with the principals in such cases hardly ever give more than their side of the story, unless of course you know how to grill them Even so, they give you some insight into themselves

Much of the material in this book is based on interviews, many of them taped, with people who have had a ringside view of the powerful ones for a long time All incidents, scenes, or quotations are based on the testimony of eyewitnesses and dependable sources, or my own personal observations Some of the facts in the book may seem startling, or at times even shocking, but they have been included after careful scrutiny and much cross checking In fact, my notebooks from a month and a half of hectic probing are spilling over with incidents and quotations which I did not use because they are either too lurid or vulgar or difficult to substantiate in a court of law One can prove the physical

assaults at the hands of a tyrant, but how does one prove the mental agonies and tortures that one may have undergone?

This is not a book on the Emergency, the roots of the recent nightmare go back deep into the past and I have tried to understand some of the principal characters in relation to their past. This is not a book that would give you an account of what happened during the Emergency, only some of the actions and events which help to show the real faces of the characters have been included in the narrative. If at times the tone is harsh or blunt, the reader must remember that the writer is only echoing the tone of the people, more often in milder terms.

I must thank some of the people who have made the book possible. But where does one begin? Indeed, there have been so many who have helped and encouraged me all through that at times I have felt overwhelmed. I owe a special debt of gratitude to that extraordinary journalist, Nikhil Chakravartty, who shared with me staggering information about men and matters. I am also deeply indebted to Girish Mathur and Ranajit Roy for their help in clarifying many ideas. But let me hasten to add that if there are any errors of fact or opinion, they are mine.

I am also grateful to Aveek Sarkar, M. J. Akbar, and Professor Damodar Thakur for having gone through parts of the manuscript and made valuable suggestions. Among the many friends whose help was invaluable were Rabindra Seth and Sanjit Sen.

I owe a very particular debt to my wife, Sohini, who not only inspired me to write the book but kept me well supplied with cigarettes and tea. With me she went over every word of the book, and was more pained than I every time a word or a sentence had to be deleted. Working harder than me were my son, Sankarshan, and daughters, Chitra and Puja, always ready with references or a duster to wipe my table clean.

Finally, my thanks to Richa, my 10-month-old daughter, who loved to sit and play under my table while I typed.

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Contents

functionary, Nehru had kept pacing up and down his room for quite a while His last night must have been a restless one Early next morning he was very ill Somewhere deep inside him, his aorta had burst and at 2 P M he was declared dead It was the end of an era

The report that had pained Nehru in his last feeble hours related, primarily, to a murky incident ten days earlier A little after the midnight of 16 May, a bunch of "high-spirited" young men drove in a brand new Fiat to a petrol pump in Motibagh, a residential area of New Delhi, ordered 20 litres of petrol and sped off, leaving the lone petrol pump attendant shouting after them for money Shortly afterwards the car crashed against a traffic island and the three drunken occupants, one of them an American, were marched off by a cop to the Motibagh police station

As it transpired later, the Fiat had been stolen about an hour earlier from outside the Nizamuddin East house of Dharam Yash Dev, the India representative of the Jayanti Shipping Corporation and a former High Commissioner in Mauritius On their way, the hoodlums stole a motorcycle from Golf Links, a posh residential colony One of the boys jumped on to the two-wheeler and roared off, he ended up a little later with a serious head injury on a patch of road under construction on way to Palam airport Some people returning from Palam identified him as Adil Shahryar, son of Mohammad Yunus, then a Joint Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry Adil, a bosom pal of Sanjay Gandhi, the second son of Indira Gandhi, was rushed in an unconscious state to the Safdarjang Hospital and later to Sen's Nursing Home

Interrogated at the police station, one of the three boys gave his address as Teen Murti House The police officer thought he was trying to act funny and gave him a rap on the back "Now tell me where you live, scoundrel!" he barked The boy still gave the same address The bewildered officer rang up the Superintendent of Police who came rushing to the police station After a little talk with the boys, the SP telephoned Teen Murti House A functionary took the phone Nehru was away in Bombay, attending the AICC session, and Indira Gandhi had gone with him They were not expected back until next morning However, within minutes, a very anxious member of the Prime Minister's house turned up and got the boys released Nothing was left on

record, so that when Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and other MPs raised the issue later in the two houses of Parliament, the then Home Minister, Gulzarilal Nanda, suffered no qualms in replying that the case had been declared by his police force as "untraced" The Sadachari Home Minister was not to be spared, though, by some journals in the country which continued to snipe at him for trying to hush up the case of the "VIP Baby"

Early morning on 17 May, Dharam Yash Dev had found the car missing and had reported the theft to the police The Fiat belonged to his younger brother, a Major in the Army, who had come on a visit Within a couple of hours the Motibagh police station rang up to say that the missing car had been traced and could somebody come and identify it Major Yashpal rushed off to the police station Just a few minutes later, a cream coloured Mercedes stopped at the gate and a very flustered looking man got down He was making anxious inquiries about the house of Major Yashpal Dharam Yash Dev came forward He knew the man very well He was Mohammad Yunus What was the matter? Why was he so troubled? Yunus told him his son had got involved in a motorcycle accident the previous night and he wanted to find out if the Major had lost a motorcycle It was all very puzzling What had been stolen from the house was a car and not a motorcycle and yet Yunus was looking for the owner of a motorcycle How on earth had he come to Dev s house of all places? Yunus must have realized he had made a faux pas, he immediately left, saying that his son was in a very serious condition and he could not lose time

A little Perry Masoning made things somewhat clearer Major Yashpal s driving licence, his Automobile Association membership card, and a few other personal belongings were missing from the smashed car's glove compartment These papers could have been the only possible clues to have brought Yunus to the East Nizamuddin house Could Adil Shahryar have pocketed these papers before changing over to the motorcycle in Golf Links? Dev, a relentless pursuer, was determined to know the truth, the whole truth, but a friendly police officer had whispered the warning 'Sir, now that you have got the car back you should consider yourself lucky Some big, very big people's sons are involved in it"

Several months later, on 10 October 1964, Dharam Yash Dev got a telephone call from an unexpected quarter On the line was Yashpal Kapoor who was already on way to becoming the principal factotum of Indira Gandhi Kapoor told Dev that Indira Gandhi wanted to see him Dev was somewhat puzzled Not that he had not met her before, but he could not quite figure out this call from the blue Anyway, he said he would go and meet her the next day

"No, no, you must come and meet her today," said Kapoor very excitedly "Indiraji is going away to Europe tonight *Bahot zaruri milna chahti hain*" (she wants to meet you very urgently)

And so at 5 o'clock that afternoon, Dev went to No 1, Safdarjang Road, the house to which Indira Gandhi had moved after Nehru's death She had become the Information and Broadcasting Minister in Lal Bahadur Shastri's government

She was effusive in her welcome She told him how fond of him "Papu" (her way of addressing her father) had been, she showed him a page from Nehru's diary where he had mentioned him, she brought out from the shelves one of the books of Dev which the AICC had published in 1944 Evidently, she had kept herself prepared for the meeting, she had even kept the page from Nehru's diary marked from before It was all very nice, but surely it was not just for this that she had to meet him so urgently Nearly an hour passed but she had not come to the point, she just kept going round and round the mulberry bush, as it were

Finally, Dev asked her why she had sent for him

'Er well, Dharam Yashji, you know some people are linking up my son's name with the car theft incident You know very well my son could never do a thing like that Besides, my son was not even here that night He was in Kashmir on a holiday"

Sanjay Gandhi had an alibi Years later, when he was poised to become the heir apparent to Indira's throne, he told the editor of a New Delhi journal that he was in Kashmir at the time of the car theft About the same time, Yunus, always a great drum beater of Sanjay Gandhi, wrote an article in a Bombay weekly in which he gave the details of the alibi "Sanjay and a friend went to Kashmir on a hitch-hiking trip, with only fifteen rupees between the two of them A friend gave them a lift up to Chandigarh, from where they went in trucks, buses or other vehicles going in that direction and took three days to reach the beautiful valley Again they

decided not to stay in one place and kept moving from one abode to another. Unfortunately, this exciting holiday came to a sudden end because of Jawaharlalji's death on 27 May 1964"

Sanjay Gandhi had indeed gone to Kashmir, but allegedly not the way Yunus described it That romantic hitch-hike was all a concocted story Sanjay and his friend, many people say, had been packed off to Srinagar by an early morning flight on 17 May and they had turned up later that evening at the house of a Muslim lady teacher who was to be their host at Srinagar They had taken care to arrive at the lady s house looking like real hitch-hikers, with mud splattered all over their trousers and shoes "Oh aunty," they had announced, "we've been hitch hiking from Delhi for the last three days!"

The entire episode, though murky in the extreme, was perhaps nothing very extraordinary for a pampered high society boy A famous doting grandfather, parents whose marriage was almost a total wreck, a whole retinue of fawning servants and craven courtiers, a pack of rumbustious friends, an environment of Western permissiveness, with all this a boy could hardly be expected to grow up into anything but a Sanjay Gandhi—arrogant, brash, and cruel And yet his elder brother, Rajiv Gandhi, who had grown up in the same milieu, was in many ways very different—modest, sober, and gentle

Mohammad Yunus, an "Afghan adventurer" who had come to be a retainer of the Nehru family, effusively describes the "childish pranks" of Sanjay and Adil "One of my earliest memories of his [Sanjay's] innocent pranks was when he was only four years old Both he and my son got into a tub full of water and poured a big packet of Lux flakes into it They thought they were being very clever to splash the flakes gleefully, without realizing what the outcome would be The more they splashed, the higher rose the foam till they were completely submerged and all one could hear was their yell [illegible]

streaks of crudeness and cruelty One of his popular sports in those days was to kick dogs around It must have given him great pleasure "Sanjay was also very reckless," recalls Shahryar "He was always driving into ditches Once he had a jeep which he drove through ploughed fields and over rocky hillsides"

One morning in 1971, some young people of Delhi arranged a picnic Sanjay Gandhi, one of the participants, turned up in a brand new jeep with a couple of charming girls Sanjay saw a beautiful green tree and boasted that he could knock it down with his jeep The girls said he could not Sanjay accepted the challenge. The bet was five rupees *He started banging the jeep against the* tree After two hours of persistent knocks the tree fell but by then the jeep had been badly damaged He had won the bet This tree-banger was later to turn into a famous tree-planter!

Wild obstinacy was an essential trait of Sanjay's character His indiscipline and rowdyism reached such proportions that the Doon School felt obliged to turn him out The boy who was later to become his mother's biggest liability was clearly a big problem for her even then But he was also his mother's pet She had something very special for him all along She would go out of her way to defend him She would even lie for him When he would fail in class and Feroze Gandhi would chastise him, his mother would come forward and say, "Oh no, he hasn't failed I know there must be a mistake I will talk to his teacher . "[3] All that this rough child seemed to care for was scrap He pottered around with nuts and bolts, wrench and hammer "Some day this boy would make a car of his own," said the hangers on of his grandfather's court That pleased and flattered the arrogant little master He soon believed it "One day I will make a car of my own," he started boasting

"But of course, Sanjay, you will make your own car," intoned that smoothest of operators, Jayanti Dharam Teja, on one of his visits to Teen Murti House He was one of the regular courtiers there With him always came his gorgeous wife, Ranjit Kaur, whom he had married after the mysterious death of his first wife, a rich American Jewess, in a Rome hotel Tall and big, Dharam Teja talked big and lived big Thanks to Nehru's patronage, he had turned almost overnight into a shipping tycoon He had started a company with an initial capital of Rs 200 and wangled a loan of Rs 20 crores from the Government of India *"Kutch thora sa to de do"* (give him a little something) was all that the gracious Nehru had told his minister Dharam Teja had suddenly rocketed into fame He had offices in New York, London, Paris, Rome,

[3]Girish Mathur in an interview with the author

Delhi, Dharam Teja could count people like V K Krishna Menon, T N Kaul, and Nehru's cousin, R K Nehru There was also a retired Army General whom he later employed on a fantastic salary, nobody seems to know why

Every now and then, Dharam Teja would ply his political chums with expensive gifts One of his very dear friends, then India's Ambassador in Moscow, loved photography, and so whenever he went and stayed with him in Moscow, which was often, he never forgot to take with him some latest model of a film projector or a camera For some he brought electronic gadgets, for some mechanical toys, and for yet others the most expensive mink coats

Where big deals were concerned, no holds were barred for some of the businessmen Scruple was a word which did not figure in their dictionary Very late one night, around 2 A M, one Indian tycoon made a long distance call from London to his representative in New Delhi

"Could you please accompany my wife to Madras by the morning flight? ' he asked "She has to go there on a very important mission "

"But the flight is only a few hours from now," said the bleary-eyed representative

"Never mind, all arrangements have been made Just go with her "

Next morning the representative accompanied the beautiful lady to Madras The tycoon was negotiating a big loan from a feudal banker in Madras but the deal had run into some trouble And so the hurried visit of his wife down South Awaiting them at the Madras airport was the banker's secretary and a chauffeur-driven limousine They were driven to the Raja Saheb's massive palace and promptly ushered into the ornate drawing room A little later materialized the master of the house, gems sparkling on his fingers After some small talk and refreshments, the Raja Saheb excused himself and disappeared into his inner appartment Some minutes later a liveried bearer came to the drawing room, bowed to the lady and said, "The lady of the house requests you

to come inside " The lady picked up her bag and followed the bearer, leaving her elderly companion in the drawing room It was not until late afternoon, with just a little time left for the plane back to Delhi, that she emerged from the *Zanana*

The tycoon's loan was through

The beautiful lady was a tremendous asset for her husband She was a great success, and not just with bankers and business magnates *She could turn on many an old politician*

That there is a dark truth about most public men is beyond doubt Very rare indeed are the public men who do not lead dark, illicit, and subterranean lives The split personality of politicians is an almost daily experience One is always up against two sets of facts and opinions the private facts and opinions of people in power and the public version of those facts and opinions which the great men—and women—feel called upon to maintain

The easy access of Dharam Teja and others of his ilk to Teen Murti House remains a conundrum for many But as the British journalist and writer, James Cameron, put it

> The tragedy of the Nehrus has been on an almost classic pattern they proclaimed and believed in the principles of social democracy and sustained and promoted their party through the nastiest aspects of unbridled and dishonest capitalism Congress has been sustained by corruption forever, by the black money from the business houses, who as *quid pro quo* have been tacitly allowed to run their own parallel economy for their personal enrichment, and the growing impoverishment of the people *This was the case even in Pandit Nehru's day it was no secret that this honest man in his final weariness was well aware of the sycophancy and corruption that surrounded him, and remained silent while it flourished because he was too vain to acknowledge it and too weak to fight it* (italics mine)

Nehru was an honest man He was an intellectual with a heightened awareness of human problems He was a man who loved intellectual dialogues with Shaw and Malraux and Marcuse and the whole array of brilliant minds Nehru loved his country and his countrymen and, as he himself said, he got back their love in such great measure ' that nothing I can do can repay even a small

fraction of it" Nehru was honest and great, but he was no saint. He had his weaknesses He liked, or at least bore with, fawning courtiers Under his large umbrella thrived Dharam Tejas and Kairons and a host of shady characters

His home was no hermit's retreat. The permissive Western traditions of Motilal Nehru's Anand Bhawan had been carried over to Teen Murti House, the massive, red sand-stone building which had been the residence of British Commanders-in-Chief. Unlike Anand Bhawan, liquor was not publicly served in Nehru's house, in deference to Congressmen's public vow, but certainly there was no puritanism about the house of Jawaharlal, whom Malraux had described as an "un-English [illegible]"

Fun and frolic was not taboo Holi at Teen Murti House was always a very pagan festival, with lots of men and women going very wild on the occasion Nehru liked pretty women He liked being surrounded by beauty In a letter to his sister from Ahmednagar jail, Nehru said "It struck me as an odd and arresting fact that for nearly 26 months—for 785 days to be exact—I had not seen a woman even from a distance And I began to wonder what are the women like? How do they look? How do they talk and sit and walk?"

Here is an incident as narrated by P[illegible], who knew Teen Murti House closely

> On a certain New Year's eve there was a party at the [illegible] (Nehru's) house and 30 or 40 guests thronged the drawing room. Among them was the principal of a girls' college and a long-time friend of the Nehru family This lady had a fondness for bright flowers and several always adorned her hair. [illegible] Nehru was clearly fascinated by them After dinner the guests assembled in the library to play "Murder" The "murderer," chosen by drawing lots, was known only to himself. He was expected to "murder" someone and, when the lights went on, to submit alongwith the others to cross-questioning by a "detective" While the others were obliged by the rules of the game to answer all questions truthfully the "murderer" could lie as blatantly as he chose, the object being to mislead the "detective" and keep his own identity from being revealed
>
> The lights were turned off, and after a moment or two of anticipation, a shrill scream pierced the darkness When the

lights were switched on, the lady with the flowers in her hair was found "murdered" on the sofa, her flowers rakishly askew. Nehru, pleased with his effort, did not wait to be cross-questioned, but sheepishly confessed to the "murder," adding that he had not been able to resist dislodging the flowers in the lady's hair

Here was just the house where the Tejas would be in their elements They never missed a chance to please the Nehrus And so, finding the wayward boy at a loose end, bent on doing nothing but tinkering with cars and two wheelers, the Tejas offered to take him with them to England and have him attached to the Rolls Royce factory

"Don't you worry, Indiraji, we shall look after him," they assured the anxious mother

And they did look after her "darling son" very well, providing him with "everything' that an impetuous young man could desire The other brother, Rajiv, was already in England under their guardianship Any time the boys got bored with living it up in England, the Tejas would tell them, "Go and have a holiday in Paris, my boys Or go to the Riviera It would be great fun at this time of the year" And so off they would go for a holiday on the Continent Money was no problem Any time they needed money, they had just to ask "Uncle Teja"

The time as Teja's "apprentice" must surely have been very educative for the boy The man who had started off with Rs 200 and become a shipping tycoon fired Sanjay's ambitions Why couldn't he become the Ford of India?

The Tejas had managed the Nehrus, but their charm did not work with that little man who succeeded Jawaharlal One day, when Teja was summoned by Lal Bahadur Shastri, he had turned up with his wife Shastri did not like it, and told Teja curtly, "The appointment was for you, not for your wife"

The dossier on Teja had grown thick, and Shastri had initiated action against him Shastri died in January 1966, but it was difficult to stop law from taking its course Indira Gandhi was still to become the empress of India, Sanjay was still to become the prince In June 1966 Teja disappeared from a 5-star hotel in Delhi and when he was arrested a year later in New York he jumped a bail of 20,000 dollars and escaped to Costa Rica But finally the

government caught up with him He was nabbed, put on trial, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment

There was a lesson in that for Tejas in the making, but such people do not learn lessons that easily

Teen Murti House was an invaluable training ground for Indira Gandhi But her long years there took their toll the springs of her womanhood had run askew She was 30 when she entered the house, 47 when she left it The prime of life Though many women, young and old, visited Teen Murti House, it was essentially a man s world, even something of a bachelors' ' den " Nehru himself had been a widower since 1936 when Kamala died of tuberculosis in Lausanne He had always kept with him in a little square basket a part of the ashes of his frail, beautiful wife But attachment to the memory of a woman is not quite the same as attachment to a living woman There was nothing of the restraints of Indian family life at Teen Murti One of the closest friends of the house, V K Krishna Menon, who had remained a bachelor, often let off his inner steam playing with mechanical toys Another permanent fixture in the house, right until 1959 when he was shown the door amidst a haze of scandal, was a small dark man M O Mathai who as Special Assistant to Nehru wielded an open influence on his master and an underhand but powerful influence on his master s daughter His influence was to be gradually weakened and then displaced by the more elemental sway over her of that Rasputin like Yoga teacher, Dhirendra Brahmachari And always lurking in the background, always at beck and call was that tall, rough hewn runaway, from the former North West Frontier Province, Mohammad Yunus who had wormed his way into the Nehru household Come to think of it, Indira Gandhi had quite a menagerie around her even in those days!

But her own man she had lost quite early "The only period of comparative domestic tranquillity she and Feroze ever enjoyed was from 1944 to 1946, the interval between the birth of Rajiv, their first son, and Sanjay, their second ' [4] In her choice of husband, Indira Gandhi's miscalculation had been as great as that of the Syndicate bosses later in choosing her to be the Prime

[4]Welles Hangen, *After Nehru Who?*

Minister She had thought Feroze was the type who would dance to her tune When she first knew him, in the early thirties at Allahabad, Feroze was a very earnest young man, a little short and thickset but handsome in his own way His biggest plus point, as far as Indira was concerned, was his complete devotion to her dear mother, Kamala Nehru Krishna Hutheesing, Nehru's sister, has recorded[5] how because of Kamala Nehru, Feroze had given up his college education to join the movement, how he had followed her on her journeys to the villages carrying a little box with her tea or coffee and sandwiches It was a Dante-Beatrice sort of relationship When Kamala had gone to Europe for treatment, Feroze had managed to persuade a relative to send him abroad for education He was at Kamala's bedside, with Nehru and Indira, when the end came

In England there had been other young Indians who had courted her Among them were Mohan Kumaramangalam, a powerful speaker and President of the Cambridge Union (later to be her Minister for Steel and Mines) and Rajni Patel, an active member of Krishna Menon's India League (who was later to become one of her principal fund collectors) Indira Gandhi was a person riven with complexes Her impression about young men who tried to court her[6] was that "they are not after me, they are after Jawahar lal Nehru's daughter " As one commentator who has probed deep into her personality pointed out,[7] Indira has always suffered from an anxiety-ridden, unavoidable complex with regard to her father A constant fear of not measuring up to, not being worthy of, Nehru

Much against her father's wishes, she decided to marry Feroze Nehru had thought that the two would not be compatible, and eventually Indira acknowledged "We were not compatible '[8] It had turned out that Feroze had nothing if not a mind of his own He was not the type to be an appendage to a woman, or a *ghar jamai*, even if the in law s house happened to be the prime minister's residence As a very close lady friend of Feroze[9] said about him, 'He was egotistical Any lesser man would have enjoyed the role

[5] *We Nehrus*
[6] A lady friend of Mrs Gandhi in an interview with the author
[7] Oriana Fallaci
[8] Mrs Gandhi to Uma Vasudev in *Indira Gandhi*
[9] Prema Mandi in an interview with Uma Vasudev

of being connected with the Prime Minister] but he had a very eep-seated grouse against himself for being in that situation "

If Indira had miscalculated about him, Feroze too had been vrong about her That shy chit of a girl was not quite the sort of erson he had thought her to be He once told a lady friend the ind of girl he would have liked to marry "I would like, I think, o get married to an *amrud wali* in my next life " Asked why, he ad replied, his eyes atwinkle, "Well, at least, she would be there to press my feet when I came home in the evenings "

The marriage failed, but the two never broke away in the formal sense Which, in a way, worsened their situation The two went their own different ways, carrying with them their mounting guilt complexes One either burns within, or indulges, or sublimates one's basic urges There was no sublimation The upshot was dissipation

Romantic by nature, Feroze was a quick and easy victim of Cupid's darts While he was the General Manager of the *National Herald*, Lucknow, he is said to have fallen in love with the daughter of an eminent Muslim leader of the city She was 'strikingly beautiful' and the involvement grew so deep[10] that at one point Feroze even talked about marrying the girl He was practically dragged to Delhi Nehru called R N Goenka, proprietor of the *Indian Express*, and got Feroze the job of Advertisement Manager on a salary of Rs 2,500 per month

For some time Feroze lived at Teen Murti House, but soon after being elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952, he was allotted a house of his own and he moved there He would go to Teen Murti House for breakfast or lunch or dinner but always return to his own house on Queen Victoria Road to spend the night During his years in Delhi he flitted from affair to affair A lovable man, full of the spunk of life, he had a close circle of friends and advisers, quite an assortment of young politicians and journalists, ranging from idealists and serious professionals to political operators-in-the making Among the "Feroze boys" were Lalit Narayan Mishra who was later to set a record in scandals and Dev Kant Barooah, a pleasure-seeking man with intellectual pretensions who was to preside over the liquidation of the Congress empire Lending charm and colour and poetry to Feroze's little court was

[10]Told to the author by a close friend of Feroze

Tarkeshwari Sinha, a captivating parliamentarian from Bihar.

Cause enough for the frequent flare ups of the famous "Nehru temper," Indira Gandhi's anger against Tarkeshwari was not because she became a Morarji girl or because she never missed an opportunity to castigate her in Parliament and outside The way she went out of her way to get Tarkeshwari defeated in 1971 elections was not a mere political revenge It was a personal vendetta As people rightly say, Indira Gandhi "never forgets"

But in those earlier days she could do little but stew with impotent rage, or take it out in dissipation During the fifties, there were times when Nehru, a non interfering man, got troubled over the goings on in the house [11] Indira Gandhi would often return to the house late at night in "quite a state' and though Nehru knew about it he did not know what he could do He was a man who respected other's privacy Nehru once gave some advice to a woman functionary of the house which showed how well he understood his daughter

"About Indu," he advised the person, ' you must understand one thing—you'll get by—be available, but don t go near her Don't intrude ' [12]

But there were a few people who could "intrude' any time, and they were not women functionaries of the house They could walk in and out of her personal rooms any time they liked

It was during these days that a poor young refugee from Pakistan who had joined the Prime Minister s house as a steno-typist was slowly becoming a "confidence man' of Indira Gandhi Yashpal Kapoor had been assigned to do some odd secretarial jobs for Indira who had become associated with a number of public organizations He was a quiet, discreet man, always available, always willing to run and do an errand without his left hand knowing what his right hand did Indira was perhaps not aware that Nehru too had assigned the young man with a rather delicate job He was to keep his eyes peeled, be around wherever Indira Gandhi happened to be, but always at a safe, discreet distance All he had to do was to ensure that she got back home without anybody getting the wiser about where she went, what she did A faithful shadow, keeping at bay any scandal that might arise

[11] A member of Nehru s personal secretariat in an interview to the author

[12] Related by Vimla Sindhi to Uma Vasudev, Indira's biographer

In a modest first floor flat tucked away amidst the criss crossing lanes of Northern Extension Area in New Delhi lives a bitter old man who tells you in the first meeting that "nobody in the whole world knows more about Indira than me We spent 13 years under the same roof" The man is dark, short, chubby, 68, and a bachelor His eyebrows are clipped, his bald pate fringed by white hair, clipped short His short snub nose gives him a bull doggish, pugnacious look

The "same roof" was of Teen Murti House The man M O Mathai, for long a favourite private secretary of Jawaharlal Nehru whom he once sent to Lord Attlee, then the Prime Minister of England, specially to study the secretarial set up at No 10 Downing Street

The book lined room is full of mementos and bric a brac from years of glory On a mantelpiece is a large picture of George Bernard Shaw flanked by Nehru and M O Mathai, much younger, slimmer and smarter then On a bookcase a somewhat fading picture of Vijayalakshmi Pandit in her youthful days From an almirah the old man brings out a carefully wrapped portrait of Nehru 'Very rare, by Steinberg!' One looks around for a picture of Indira Gandhi, but there is none in sight

Mathai is not very communicative about many things, but sometimes when a sore point is touched, his little eyes peer out and the pent up lava bursts "Her prime ministership? What do I think of *her* prime ministership? In 1966, a minister had come to me to seek my advice about the leadership I told him 'do what you like but if she [Indira] becomes Prime Minister she will ruin the country' I didn t know how long it would take, and now you see she has ruined the country and has ruined herself in the process"

He is hardly able to contain his contempt 'She had no qualities to be the Prime Minister I know very well, more than any other man in the world No qualities whatever Only illusions, as most women have'

One can see *one* reason why he has remained a bachelor, he has a rather poor opinion about women

The old man is suddenly expansive when he talks about Nehru His eyes twinkle "Nehru was a great man a laaarge hearted man, very laaarge hearted '

How come Indira Gandhi had not imbibed the qualities of her

great father? "Why? Why didn't she? Why was the son of Mahatma Gandhi a wreck? '

The old man is even more contemptuous when he talks about Sanjay Gandhi "A swollen headed chap Was thrown out of school for rowdyism No brains Can't write even two sentences Like mother, like son "

Amazing how proximity sometimes leads to utter contempt *Mathai was a trusted man of Nehru and was privy to many* secrets of the household How and why he fell from grace is a story he would not tell himself but his attitudes and reactions to some of the members of the household give him away Scorn is writ large on his face when he talks about Yashpal Kapoor "It was I who had given him to Indira for secretarial work and he wormed his way, ingratiated himself," Mathai says with withering disdain

His face twists into a grotesque grimace when he is asked about Feroze Gandhi He is about to blurt out something, then stops "I'll not go into personal matters " But he bursts out at the name of Dhirendra Brahmachari "That Brahmachari!" he exclaims sneeringly "Don't I know that Brahmachari? Bakshi Gulam Mohammad [then the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir] had told me that this man had misbehaved with some women who had gone to him to learn yoga Bakshi had thrown this man out of Kashmir Indira had first met this so called Brahmachari at Pahalgaum when she had gone there holidaying with her children "

Soon after Indira Gandhi became Minister for Information and Broadcasting and was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, a small group of young parliamentarians, some of them with a leftist, progressive image veered round her and formed what came to be known as the "Back-benchers' Club " It included I K Gujral, Asoka Mehta, Dinesh Singh, Chandra Shekhar, and Nandini Satpathy

In a way, this was the first of a series of caucuses around Indira Gandhi, a series leading up to that monstrous last caucus which finished her The first was different from the last one There was a whole world of difference in the people who formed her first caucus and her last

Inder Kumar Gujral, a gentleman to the finger-tips, was to be the first victim of Indira's last caucus He had started as a com-

munist student worker in Lahore, become a member of the CPI, but after partition he had moved first to Jullunder and then to New Delhi where he had become a building contractor His painter brother, Satish Gujral, was part of Indira Gandhi's arty circle and Gujral who had joined the Congress had come close to her Asoka Mehta, the bearded socialist theoretician, had come to the Congress via the Praja Socialist Party and was to become a close colleague of Indira Gandhi until the time of the great split when he thought "the woman would sell the country to Russia "[13] Nandini Satpathy was a former card-holding "comrade" and Indira Gandhi's confidante who was later to be entrusted with the *jagirdari* of Orissa Chandra Shekhar was a progressive Congressman who hated the Tammany Hall types in the Congress Only Dinesh Singh, neither socialist nor progressive, was a queer fish in the group His father and grandfather, the Rajas of Kalakankar in Uttar Pradesh, had been the clients of Indira Gandhi's grandfather, and Nehru had picked up Dinesh Singh for deputy ministership in the External Affairs Ministry in 1962 Smart, Doon School-educated, younger than Indira Gandhi by eight years, Dinesh Singh was to remain in her "inner circle" for several years until he became too boastful about his sway on her and was cast aside like useless linen

One of the undeclared objectives of this "Back-benchers' Club" was to embarrass Lal Bahadur Shastri on whom Nehru's mantle had willy-nilly fallen The little man who had become Nehru's confidant during his last weary years had often played with Indira Gandhi when she was a lonely, insecure little girl in Anand Bhawan But Indira Gandhi had never really liked him She could never think of him as anything but an ordinary lieutenant of her father, a man with outdated ideas, in any case someone far below her

Soon after she was chosen the Prime Minister, the New York-based writer, Ved Mehta, asked her what she thought of Shastri as the Prime Minister, and she said "Basically, he just didn't have a modern mind He was an orthodox Hindu and full of superstitions You can't lead the country out of poverty with superstition "

It is no secret that Indira Gandhi wanted to become the Prime

[13]Quoted in Kuldip Nayar's *India The Critical Years*.
[14]Ved Mehta, *Portrait of India*

Minister right after her father's death And even Nehru, despite his democratic faith, had wanted it that way In his failing years he had thought of Indira as his successor and confided his secrets and ploys only to her When he returned to Delhi after his last visit to Dehra Dun, Umashankar Dixit, another "retainer" of the Nehrus, had gone to meet Nehru One of the points Nehru mentioned to Dixit that evening was about his daughter "Indu can take decisions Help her, help her "[15] Kamaraj, the king-maker, is said to have confided to political colleagues and journalists close to him that Nehru had told him "After me, Indira "

Nehru, when confronted with the question by R K Karanjia, Editor of *Blitz*, said, "I am certainly not grooming her for anything of the sort That does not mean she should not be called to occupy any position of responsibility after me "[16]

Ved Mehta asked Indira Gandhi if press reports were true when they said that Nehru wanted her to succeed him as Prime Minister and that she could easily have done so Her reply to the question was not in the negative While an elegant gentleman-artist, Feliks Topoloski, who was her "house guest," drew crayon sketches of her from all angles, Indira Gandhi told Mehta "I was numbed by my father's death, and at the time I didn't want to think about holding any office But I thought if I helped Shastri to become Prime Minister, then, when he got the office, he would consult with me, and in that way I would still have some influence on the future of our country I did many things for Shastri but once he got established as Prime Minister he didn't *consult me on any of the major issues* "

One of the issues on which the "Back-benchers' Club" had planned to pillory Shastri and, if possible, oust him, was the Tashkent Agreement Kamaraj, the then Congress President, had fallen out with Shastri within hours of his becoming the Prime Minister in 1964 Kamaraj felt slighted over being bypassed in ministry-making, and whereas he had talked of the emergence of a "collective leadership" in the country, Shastri had made plain that he had been elected leader and he intended to be the leader

And so Shastri's return from Tashkent had been chosen as

[15]H D Malaviya, MP, in an interview with the author
[16]*Illustrated Weekly of India*, 14 20 November 1976

a good point to mount an attack on him But instead of Shastri it was his body that returned to India

With Shastri suddenly out of the way, she climbed to the prime ministership on the back of another caucus, the old Syndicate bosses who had thought, mistakenly, that she was a *gungi gudiya* (a dumb doll) She had nothing if not a mind of her own, a very imperious mind, full of illusions of grandeur By all accounts her intellectual calibre was of a low order Her schooling had been slip-shod and perfunctory and she had failed thrice in tests for entrance to Oxford University But soon after becoming the Prime Minister she began to show her immense capacity for manipulating men and events She was a shrewd intriguer "A crafty woman without depth" was how Krishna Menon often described her [17] Her deep sense of insecurity, right from her days of childhood, had warped her mind She could never look at anything straight, never meet a person and not suspect that he had some ulterior motive She herself was a great one at intrigues, at playing one against the other She was great too at using people and then kicking them out the moment they became inconvenient to her or showed the slightest signs of having a mind of their own Never able to trust anybody for long, she kept changing her set of advisers, until in the end she found the sort of people who suited her temperament and style best—a set of fawning wheeler-dealers

For about a year after she became the Prime Minister her close circle of advisers continued to be by and large the same people who had been in the "Back-benchers' Club"—Gujral, Nandini Satpathi, Asoka Mehta, Chandra Shekhar, Dinesh Singh Also in the charmed circle, which came to be known as the "kitchen cabinet," was Romesh Thapar, an eminent left-wing journalist who belonged to Delhi's cultured elite At one time he was interested in the production of documentary films, which first brought him close to Indira Gandhi when she was the Minister for Information and Broadcasting

The kitchen cabinet was some sort of a combination of a secretariat and brains trust of Indira Gandhi, who certainly needed brains to cover up her own inadequacy But of these people around her, the one on whom she leaned most was

[17]Nikhil Chakravartty in an interview with the author.

Dinesh Singh whose own intellectual calibre was nothing to write home about He was an obedient odd-job man and for a time at least he seemed to have the complete trust of Indira Gandhi Whether her problem was to strike a deal with C.B Gupta in Uttar Pradesh or to instigate a revolt against Mohanlal Sukhadia in Rajasthan, it was Raja Dinesh Singh she chose for the job Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Umashankar Dixit, and D P Mishra, the shrewd political manipulator from Madhya Pradesh, were also close to her politically but it was Dinesh Singh who had her eyes and ears At one point she even got his special advisory role formalized through a presidential notification

For a time, L.K Jha, a top ICS officer, continued to be her Principal Secretary She had respect for his ability, but she had a point against him he had been too closely associated with Shastri as his Principal Secretary Soon after the general elections of 1967, in which half a dozen states slipped out of the Congress fold, L K Jha was kicked upstairs He was sent off as Governor of the Reserve Bank

In his place came P N Haksar, and with his arrival changed the scenario of Indira's court It marked the start of the ascendancy of the Prime Minister's Secretariat as also of the new image that the lady was to acquire during the next few years Her "years of glory" not only coincided with the "Haksar years" but were a direct result of Haksar's management of the country's affairs

Though a Kashmiri Brahmin, Haksar went to Kashmir for the first time in 1960 He grew up at Allahabad, went to London School of Economics, and later the Inner Temple In London, he was very active in student politics, was a member of the London Majlis, and was known to have Marxist views He returned to India during the Second World War, and was attached for some years to the Communist Party He settled down at Allahabad and began practising law under Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru In 1948 Nehru picked him for the first delegation going to the United Nations on the Kashmir issue He had gone as a junior legal adviser to the delegation and had made a good impression at the UN On coming back to India, he wanted to return to the Bar, but Jawaharlal asked him "Is the Bar more ethical than serving this government?"[18] That was the beginning of his long and distin-

[18]*Ibid*

guished career in the Indian Foreign Service He was Deputy High Commissioner in London when he was called back to be Indira Gandhi's Principal Secretary

He in fact soon became the virtual Prime Minister of India for the next few years—the years which saw the rise of Indira Gandhi and her virtual deification as Goddess Durga It was during this time that the great myths about her 'hurricane tactics' and sound instinct and sure judgment and all the rest of it got built up Haksar and the professionals whose services he requisitioned provided Indira Gandhi with a prop against which she continued to grow taller and taller Haksar was no courtier of hers, but he was unquestionably loyal to her and worked assiduously to make her position strong and unassailable Slowly but steadily he concentrated in the Prime Minister's Secretariat the power over all the economic ministries and then gradually brought under himself the political aspects of the Prime Minister's functions as well The whole strategy of the split was planned and directed from Haksar's office Even the correspondence and political statements and speeches of Indira Gandhi emanated from Haksar So did her so-called "stray thoughts" which she sent to the crucial AICC session at Bangalore They were really Haksar's "stray thoughts" which he had put together hurriedly It was during this time, again, that the intelligence agencies of the government were used to the fullest in advancing Indira Gandhi's political prospects The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), headed by Kau, another Kashmiri Brahmin, was being fast transformed into a personal spy agency of Indira Gandhi

These were the years when one of the principal tasks before Indira Gandhi was to bring down the opposition governments in many of the states It was really Haksar who laid down the policy and the strategy The Prime Minister's Secretariat had become a strong weapon to increase her hold on the party, a function that was none of its business

To put the record straight, then, it was under Haksar that the unabashed use of government power and machinery began for all sorts of political purposes The only difference was that while the operations under Haksar had some finesse about them so that they did not darken the image of Indira Gandhi, the post Haksar operations became so crude and brazen that they tarred her face black The concentration of power that Haksar had brought

They were all proteges of P N Haksar, mostly people with a communist past Rajni Patel, D P Dhar, Chandrajeet Yadav, Siddhartha Shankar Ray and, later, Dev Kant Barooah

Mishra, however, knew that he could never achieve the pre dominant place in the court as long as Haksar was around There was another important man who wielded great influence on Indira Gandhi and who did not approve of Mishra's money-bag politics The man was Mohan Kumaramangalam, one of Indira's heroes in her student days in England He had joined as Minister of Steel and Heavy Engineering in March 1971, and was one of the few who could not be described as a courtier of Indira Gandhi, even as her Minister He was a man Mishra considered a potential hurdle, but the first priority was to somehow elbow Haksar out of the way Haksar had achieved his position not by sycophancy but by what he had done to raise her position to new heights He had been her brain in all her successful moves He was far too superior to be beaten on his own ground, and Mishra knew it too well He found another way of defeating him If Haksar had a complete hold over her mind, he would have a hold on her sentiments He decided he would play on the greatest weakness of Indira Gandhi Sanjay!

After three wild and dissolute years in England, Sanjay Gandhi had returned to India, without completing his course at the Rolls Royce England had been no England for the boy after the Tejas had got into trouble and escaped to America and then to Costa Rica Besides, his mother was now the Prime Minister His dreams *of becoming the Ford of India looked so much brighter now* He had no certificate from the Rolls Royce but he had learnt a lot in the "Teja School " His mother's efforts to persuade him to go back and complete his course failed, he was determined to stay and "make good " Just turned 20, he was far more headstrong than he had been when he left

During one of his many youthful scrapes, Sanjay had met a character called Arjan Das who ran a puncture repair shop in South Delhi He was a short, uncouth man, something of an underworld character, but the two had hit it off almost immediately ("because their IQ levels were the same " is one of the many explanations given by people who have known both of them), and Arjan Das had taken Sanjay to the junkyards of Gulabi Bagh in old Delhi, where the first Maruti was to be "cannibalized "

Before long there were others putting ideas into the boy's head The discerning eyes of Yashpal Kapoor and L N Mishra had not missed the almost instinctive antipathies between Haksar and the boy, nor had they failed to realize the great hold that Sanjay had on his mother Was it simply a mother's love for her son? Many thought there was much more to it than that

There is the story of a nocturnal fight between the mother and the son at No 1, Safdarjang Road Here is an account by a staff of the former Prime Minister's house

> The boy used to return very late in the night, often in quite a terrible state and he brought with him all sorts of people .. you know what I mean The Prime Minister used to be very troubled One night she instructed the staff not to open the doors if he came back with somebody very late He came back late with a friend and started banging the door He was obviously not quite himself When there was no response, he started banging harder and grew abusive Finally, the door opened and she stood there looking very grim and stern "You have no business to come home like this and bring all sorts of people with you," she told him "Shut up, you " he barked "You first throw out your wretched people and I'll not bring anybody" She flared up at him and there was quite an exchange between them "All right, I am quitting," he threatened "I'll not come back but tomorrow morning I'll hold a press conference and expose you before all the world" That did it She broke down, and as far as I know she never again tried to tame him

The *Washington Post* South Asia correspondent, Lewis M Simons, who was expelled from India soon after the Emergency was clamped, reported that a family friend who attended a dinner party with Sanjay and Indira Gandhi said he saw the son slap his mother 'six times' across the face "She didn't do a thing," the friend said 'She just stood there and took it. She's scared to death of him"

What is it that she was so scared of? Was it some deep guilt in her? Or did he have something to blackmail her with? Or was it simply that she was one of those women who feel the psychic umbilical cord with such great intensity that they [illegible]

think of their child leaving them? "The overindulgent mother," says an American lady psychiatrist, "who subjects herself completely to her children's tyranny, and who exerts her overprotection in this more passive way, is certainly a woman whose inner fear springs from masochistic guilt-laden sources "[19] Whatever the cause, there was no denying the fact that the boy had an abnormal hold on his famous mother

Out to play on the weakness, L N Mishra soon became another Dharam Teja for Sanjay "Just go ahead with your plans, Sanjayji," he told the boy, "you don't have to bother about land or money What are we for? ' The boy wanted his Detroit like factory somewhere close to his mother's seat of power It was Mishra who thought of the bright idea There were miles and miles of fields just beyond Palam They fell in the jurisdiction of Haryana state which made it all the better, for his long time pal and fellow-*chela* of Nanda had by sheer chance become the Chief Minister there He immediately got in touch with this chum, took him into confidence, and told him it was going to be an "investment of a life time" and he must never miss an opportunity like that Bansi Lal needed no convincing, he jumped at the idea Even while Indira Gandhi was scaling the heights of glory, the ground was being prepared for her fall A mammoth structure, a monument of nepotism and corruption, rose on the lands of over 1,500 poor peasants who were evicted by the strong-arm methods of a Jat bully

One man who had advised Indira Gandhi against Maruti right in the beginning was P N Haksar He had told her plainly that it would land her into trouble some day That in itself would have been enough to set the boy against Haksar But he had been difficult in other ways too "There had been bad blood between the two men for years," wrote J Anthony Lukas in the *New York Times*, "dating from the day when Haksar had to get Sanjay out of several youthful scrapes involving drink, cars and women Most recently, Sanjay Gandhi blamed Haksar for hostility to the Maruti project and for refusal to backdate a letter which would have legalized one of his mother's disputed election practices "

Yashpal Kapoor and Umashankar Dixit were finding Haksar a big hurdle in many of their operations If, for instance, Kapoor had to strike a deal with the groundnut industry, the policy clear-

[19]Helene Deutsch, *Psychology of Women*, Part 2

way back in 1959 when she was the Congress President Indira Gandhi had been lobbying hard for intervention in Kerala and Feroze had taken a stand against it He thought it was undemocratic to dismiss an elected government, whether it was a communist government or otherwise The issue had come up at breakfast table at Teen Murti House, and there had been quite a row between Indira and Feroze, with Nehru looking on very distressed [29]

"It is just not right," Feroze had said, "You are bullying people You are a fascist"

Indira Gandhi had flared up "You are calling me a fascist I can't take that" And she had walked out of the room in rage

Years later, after she had become the Prime Minister, she made a remark to a foreign lady journalist, which was a clear indication of the way her mind was working After a long interview in her office in South Block, Indira Gandhi had walked down with the lady journalist Outside they had come across an aged beggar in a heap of rags and the journalist had murmured "Things certainly move a bit slowly in India" Oriana Fallaci had barely uttered the words when "five steely fingers" gripped her arm and an icy voice retorted "What do you want me to do? I'm surrounded by a bunch of idiots And democracy "

That showed her arrogance as well as despair Later, power went to her head and when that happened nobody was unexpendable except herself P N Haksar left in January 1973 In early February, the "Empress of India" elevated L N Mishra to the cabinet rank, gave the home portfolio to her former "munimji," Pandit Umashankar Dixit, the juicy foreign trade to an inexperienced but a potential collector, D P Chattopadhya, who could go about the operations with philosophic calm and brought in as Deputy Minister an obedient young man from West Bengal, who was later to handle the country's banking operations to the best advantage of Indira Gandhi's heir apparent One big hurdle that the tuft hunters gathering fast around Sanjay Gandhi could have faced was Mohan Kumaramangalam, but he died in an air crash in June 1973

With the prop that had held Indira Gandhi gone, she fell to her own base level In August 1973, Chandra Shekhar (now Chairman

[29]Related by Nikhil Chakravartty to the author

of the Janata Party) told a Bombay weekly that the Congress Party had "once again become the victim of coteries and cliques" What was emerging was not a socialist army but an "Indira menagerie"

The operations of Indira and her courtiers were getting cruder and cruder Gujarat was up in flames and anger was slowly mounting in Bihar Commented a socialist journal of Delhi "There is at least one scandal every day in Indira Gandhi's government of which she herself is the centre Nagarwala case, Maruti, Mastan, Kapadia, are some of the innumerable scandals with which the Prime Minister had been connected directly Thanks to her, all these scandals are destroying the country "[21]

The licence-cum forgery racket burst like a stink bomb in the 1974 autumn session of Parliament, one of the most dismal in the country's parliamentary history The shocking revelations jolted the lackeys and yes-men of the Prime Minister But by her steam-roller majority, she had reduced Parliament to no more than her rubber-stamp A shattering blow had been dealt to public confidence in parliamentary system as an effective instrument of good government Wrote her one time friend, Romesh Thapar "Indira Gandhi cannot act because she will have to destroy her closest collaborators who have destroyed the credibility of the party"

By late 1974, Indira Gandhi was clearly moving fast towards authoritarianism The so-called "Kashmiri Mafia" which had wielded power in her court had been replaced by the "Punjabi Mafia," composed of crude roughies like Bansi Lal and the whole lot of tuft hunters who had crept into the corridors of power along with Sanjay's ex model wife, Maneka Already some cronies of the Prime Minister had floated the idea of "limited democracy" and Indira's CPI caucus was clamouring for a clamp down on "fascist Jayaprakash" In October, the CPI lobbyist, D K Barooah was brought in as Congress President and the so called "anti fascist" jamborees began all over the country The wishy-washy 13 point programme that came out from the secret conclave at Narora was only a cover for the inner group's decision to come down with a heavy hand on anybody who challenged her authority By then she had also decided to get rid of some of her political liabilities At one point she even toyed with the idea of another "Kamaraj Plan," mainly as an excuse to drop L N Mishra who

[21]*Pratipaksha*

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[31] *Pratipaksha*

had by then become too powerful and too much of a political liability for her But as it so happened, Mishra fell a victim to a bomb explosion

By 1975 Indira Gandhi had been reduced to straits, and so had her darling son, Sanjay Gandhi The huge Detroit like factory building had gone up, but there was no money to equip it with machines Many business tycoons had contributed substantially to the share capital of the ' big man's small car," but by 1975, Maruti Ltd had mobilized only about Rs 6 crores in the form of loans, dealer deposits, and paid up capital This was far short of Rs 60-70 crores needed to put the project going He was constantly in need of money, more and more money Even the establishment expenses were becoming a problem The oil price hike had already hit the car industry so badly that there was no room for another car in the market, a so-called "people's car" now to be priced at Rs 24,000 He knew he had failed, but he had to prove that he hadn't failed He turned to public financial institutions for help But they wanted "concrete evidence" that his factory could turn out cars, and he had no such evidence

In utter despair, he had thought of "diversifying" the factory and had started making bus bodies, mostly for the Haryana State Transport Corporation, thanks to his great chum, Bansi Lal But he still had bigger things in mind collaborations with American and German firms, contracts from the public sector enterprises, defence contracts But all these required the constant flow of money and that in turn necessitated that he and his mother had untrammelled power Dictatorship was the logical extension of both his mother's policies and his own ambitions

The judgment of the Allahabad High Court came in handy On 12 June 1975, Sanjay Gandhi had rushed back from the Maruti factory on hearing the news A pall of gloom had descended on No 1, Safdarjang Road He had rushed in, clasped his mother in his arms and sobbed But later, while Indira Gandhi conferred with her partymen in one of the rooms, Sanjay and his goons met separately to chalk out their strategy The ticker-tapes had started giving the results of the Gujarat elections Another defeat Only that morning D P Dhar, a confidant of Indira Gandhi, had passed away Tragedy heaped upon tragedy

Indira Gandhi had made up her mind to quit, at least for the

interregnum, till the Supreme Court gave its verdict on her petition She had even written out a letter of resignation, but Sanjay had other plans He had rushed to her room, snatched the letter from her hand, and said "Mummy, you will never get power back this way "[22] Tearing the letter, he had said firmly, "Now let me take care of the situation " Behind him stood his hatchetman, Bansi Lal

[22]An eyewitness to the author in an interview

Though Sharma had been kept out of the elections, his supporters pressed that he should be elected the leader To scuttle this, Indira Gandhi got a snap decision taken by the Congress Parliamentary Board to restrict the choice of leader to members of the state legislature

She also sent her two kitchen cabinet "boys," Dinesh Singh and I K Gujral, to Gulzarilal Nanda, the "godfather" of Haryana politics, to persuade him to keep Sharma out of the run

"Have anybody but not him," the emissaries told Nanda

"But who? Where is the other man? ' Nanda asked

"Why, you can have anyone from the elected legislators," said one of the emissaries "You can choose this gentleman if you like," he had said casually, pointing to a lanky, bespectacled man standing obsequiously behind Nanda

Nanda had turned round to see the man Ah, it was his good old Bansi, his chela and errand boy Ever since he had come to the Rajya Sabha in 1960, by a sheer quirk of destiny, this rustic briefless lawyer from Bhiwani had become a great devotee of Nanda The man always hung around him, always at his beck and call The man had been elected to the State Assembly but Nanda could never have thought of him as Chief Minister In fact, after he had ceased to be the Union Home Minister, Nanda had nursed a lurking hope that he might be called upon to be the *Chief Minister himself But since that didn't seem to be getting* anywhere, wouldn't the next best thing be to rule the state through a dummy?

Nanda thought for a minute or two Then he smiled his Mephistophelean smile and declared, "All right, let it be Bansi Lal"

Even Sharma had later concurred with the decision, more out of pique than anything else Better far to have a non-entity, he thought, than to let one of his rivals grab the job "Let it go Bansi, you know, will resign whenever we ask him to," Nanda had told him Little did they know that they were creating a Frankenstein!

The seeds of crudeness intrigue, and trickery were sown quite early in his life Bansi Lal's physical roughness and mental barrenness were akin to the sandy wilderness of Gola Garh, the village where he was born A harsh and eerie landscape often

swept by blinding sandstorms from across the Rajasthan border, the trees gnarled and spiky, the earth cracked and chafed with frequent droughts which turned so quickly into famines An environment as repellent as the man it produced A petty lot of uncouth habitation amidst an atmosphere of grim poverty with lots of petty feuds and frequent brawls Bansi Lal's vulgar language could well be traced back to those early days

His father, Mohar Singh, was not really in the depths of poverty but if the police record of the village are any indication, he had acquired notoriety as a "crafty man" who could not easily be trusted One entry by the Station House Officer in the village crime notebook said "Mohar Singh Jat [Bansi Lal's father] is an artificial or pretentious sort of person He wants to establish his prestige by bringing to bear all kinds of pressures on the police The man is unreliable " This was dated 1 July 1950 [2]

But to go back a little, when Bansi Lal was a boy of 14, his father moved with the family to a nearby place called Loharu, the capital of a petty Nawabdom Mohar Singh, who had even earlier tried to ingratiate himself with the rapacious Nawab whenever he passed through Gola Garh on one of his predatory missions, now became a petty courtier at Loharu An eulogistic biography of Bansi Lal[3] gave this description of the Nawab's court "Corruption raged in every department in all its oppressive viciousness The durbar itself was unbridled in its pursuit after wealth for personal gratification The whole hierarchy of officialdom, from the Dewan downwards, was engaged shamelessly in catering to what seemed to be irrepressible lust for money Nobody cared for the common man who was left to die of hunger or thirst or through sheer frustration " By all accounts, a very faithful picture of the Loharu court, but the writer could hardly be credible when he observed that Bansi Lal was "shocked ' and "appalled" by it all On the contrary, it would appear from the way he later turned the whole of Haryana into a far more grotesque Nawabdom and then proceeded to make the whole country the same, that he must have loved his childhood durbar It was there that he learnt his first lessons in intrigue, corruption, tyranny, and palace manoeuvres

[2]*Ibid*

[3]Muni Lal *Bansi Lal Profile of a Chief Minister*

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[2] *Ibid*

[3] Muni Lal, *Bansi Lal Profile of a Chief Minister*

The area around had much else to teach the growing boy Often called the gateway to Rajasthan, the Loharu-Bhiwani area was a hunting ground for smugglers, freebooters, and crooks out to get rich quick "Not possessing any other source of revenue, the nawabs of Loharu condoned, and even abetted, illegalities in trading " This pathological, evil-smelling world, where everyone was on edge for a chance to scramble upwards, became Bansi Lal s home and formative background

For several years he worked as a *muneem* in a grain shop, loading and unloading grain bags, weighing at the scales, keeping the ledgers Then for a time he ran a bus service in partnership with some relatives He himself worked as the conductor, and sometimes when no driver was available he would sit at the wheels Many persons in the area still remember him as a "foul mouthed conductor who always abused and bullied the poor passengers and extorted extra money from them "

But Bansi Lal was an ambitious man He was not leaving any avenues for going up in life While he was doing all the other things and learning all the great lessons at the Nawab's court, he was also after other qualifications Always a great believer in short-cuts, Bansi Lal managed to pass the "Prabhakar" examination from Bhatinda which enabled a person to sit for that peculiar brand of B A "in English Only " And so some years later he got a B A too—"B A via Bhatinda," as the Haryana MP, Sher Singh, contemptuously calls it

Both Sher Singh and Devi Lal, one of the first mentors of Bansi Lal, are unanimous about the man's one great quality "He has always been a first-rate political tout " At first, he was the "tout" of Devi Lal himself, that rough hewn Jat leader from Hissar district who has been in and out of different parties half a dozen times After his long "apprenticeship" under Devi Lal, during which he learnt the essentials of political crookery, Bansi Lal went to Delhi by another quirk of destiny, as a member of the Rajya Sabha, and for the next six years "he served as a tout of Gulzarilal Nanda"[4] along with his *chela in arms,* Lalit Narayan Mishra Gradually, he touted up the ladder and finally became the "tout in chief" of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay But no, there can hardly be any finality about such slippery characters, there is no

[4]Sher Singh in an interview with the author

knowing whose man he might next become

Devi Lal remembers vividly the long legged, long faced young man who used to come to see him frequently during the late forties Bansi Lal was then studying law in a Jullunder college and Devi Lal was already a force to be reckoned with in Punjab Congress politics "I was on the look out," says Devi Lal, "for some educated man who could assist me in Hissar district politics This young chap used to hang around me and I started giving him lift First I got him into the Mandal Congress Committee and then later into the District Congress Commitee He always used to show himself as a loyal type of man Once he bungled with some accounts and when I reprimanded him he started weeping and I forgave him"

In 1960, four Rajya Sabha seats from the state fell vacant and a panel of names was sent to the then Congress President, U N. Dhebar, a Gandhite for whom politics was primarily caste Dhebar did not want a Jat to go to the Rajya Sabha presumably because of an inbuilt aversion to the community In the panel he saw the name "Hukam Singh" and said that must be a Jat, he promptly crossed it out Why blame the comical Dev Kant Barooah for his obsession with caste? Wasn't he only presiding over the liquidation of a caste obsessed party which had gone rotten to the core long ago?

Dhebar sent the panel of names back, but the Jats were not to be outdone so easily "We decided to send a name which did not sound like a Jat name at all," says Devi Lal, in a conspiratorial whisper even now, 17 years later "The name that struck me was Bansi Lal That was very much a Bania like name I thought, and Dhebar Bhai ought to like it"

Bansi Lal knew nothing about it When he saw the name in the list he went to Devi Lal and asked, "Who is this Bansi Lal?" He could never imagine that he would be nominated for the Rajya Sabha "Oh, that's some Bansi Lal Mehta," Devi Lal told him

Dhebar reacted to the name just as the Jat leaders had thought. "Bansi Lal, B A, LL.B"—it sounded all right to him and he okayed it, without asking any further questions That is how great decisions have been taken by that august party which ruled the country for three decades! When the list was officially released, Devi Lal told Bansi Lal, "This is *your* name" He looked dumbfounded And so the man went to the Rajya Sabha "He is a

terrific sycophant " says Devi Lal "In the Rajya Sabha he used to lobby for me He once gave a speech at Fatehabad and said 'Devi Lal is my father ' A great *dalal*, that man Soon he became the *dalal* of Nanda He was almost his domestic servant "

He served Nanda so well that when Bhagwat Dayal Sharma became the first Chief Minister of Haryana, the great Sadachari tried hard to make Bansi Lal a deputy minister but Sharma rejected him because of his shady past

Bansi Lal, according to an oft-told tale, abstained from voting in the Haryana Assembly Speaker's election in 1967 in return for a bribe of Rs 200 from Devi Lal But Devi Lal puts it somewhat differently

> The bribe story, you see, is not really true All that happened was that I told him not to go for the voting and he had obeyed He just stayed on in the bathroom all the time, having a long bath I had told him to do that He was an obedient boy Money of course I always gave him, sometimes two hundred sometimes five hundred
>
> Came the mid-term elections of 1968 Bansi Lal was elected and I used him to create an atmosphere against Bhagwat Dayal Sharma who was again trying to become the Chief Minister I told Bansi, "Go and stick to Bhagwat Dayal, try to create the impression that you are very loyal to him, and meanwhile I will try that he does not become the CM " Bansi did just as I had told him Sharma was outmanoeuvred and as it so happened the great sycophant himself emerged as the Chief Minister of Haryana

On 19 May 1968, Bansi Lal was elected leader of the Haryana Congress Legislature Party Very little was known about the man except that he was 41 years old, the youngest Chief Minister in the country, and had been President of a Mandal Congress Committee in Hissar district until 1960 He had begun by saying, at his first press conference at Nanda's house, that "my first and foremost concern will be to provide the state with a clean, efficient and impartial administration "[5] Many had welcomed his youth and rusticity, thinking perhaps that he was something like Gandhiji's

[5] *Indian Express*, 20 May 1968

conception of a "peasant-leader " Many newspapers had described him just as a "dark horse" That he indeed was, but nobody knew then how black he would turn out to be

He was soon to show his real self Posted in Delhi at that time was a Press Liaison Officer of the Haryana government, a man named *Rajendra Sareen, who had earlier been* a special correspondent of a Delhi newspaper Within a short time, Sareen had some peppery encounters with the new Chief Minister which showed him in the raw

The first was during Bansi Lal's very first press conference In reply to questions on the future of Chandigarh, the new Chief Minister said he was not at all convinced that Haryana's interests demanded the city's inclusion in the state This, in the background of the protracted wrangle between Punjab and Haryana over Chandigarh, was quite a statement! With his newsman's instinct, Sareen immediately knew that the Chief Minister had committed a faux pas, and he thought it his duty to intervene

"If I may have your permission, Sir, I would request the press correspondents to treat your remark as off the record," Sareen said to Bansi Lal

Visibly irritated, the Chief Minister looked at him hard With a mixture of pique and annoyance, he said in his crude Haryanvi "Do as you like I have said what I wanted to "

Sareen could see how much annoyance he had caused, but he requested the correspondents *to treat the remark as off the record* He did not know that the Nawab of Haryana had made a mental note of his crime

Before going back to Chandigarh, Bansi Lal told Sareen, "Look Nandaji is my guru His commands should be obeyed "

What sort of commands? Nanda was his guru, but officially he had no position in the Haryana government Sareen wanted the Chief Minister to clarify his parting orders Newsmen-turned-officers are a strange kettle of fish They remain both newsmen and officers and yet in a way they are neither newsmen nor officers They are somewhere in between, a strange mixture, and such a man can be very irritating to an autocrat who expects his officers to be blind yes-men

This was the second time in two days that Sareen had thrown his weight in his way, part of it of course Sareen could not help—his physical weight was enormous "You ask too many questions '

Bansi Lal told him irascibly "I am not used to all this question-answer," he added and his car drove off

What a cocky man, thought Sareen Even so, he did a good job of pleasing Bansi Lal's guru Nanda's commands were usually of petty nature, not very difficult to obey But at times he gave bizarre orders One day, for instance, he called Sareen and said "You see, a professor from Chandigarh wrote to me some days back requesting for my bio data He wants to write a book on my dedicated life and mission But unfortunately I have misplaced the letter and I do not remember either the professor's name or his address Could you please find out who it was?"

"Sir, I'll see what can be done," said Sareen Not the one to give up challenges easily, Sareen promptly sent off circular letters to all the college principals and heads of department in Chandigarh and the professor who wanted to write on Nanda's "dedicated life and mission" was traced within three days

"Not even the intelligence agencies of the Home Ministry could have done it so fast," exclaimed Nanda very appreciatively The old man started praising Sareen to everybody What an efficient man!

This should have gone down well with Nanda's old chela, Bansi Lal But soon the wily man from Gola Garh decided to cut himself loose from his "gurus" and "fathers" and launch himself independently In that quest, the Chief Minister was at first willing to do anything to oblige Bhagwat Dayal Sharma who was still a force in Haryana politics Sharma had a long standing grudge against the Pradesh Congress Committee chief, Ramkrishna Gupta To oblige Sharma, Bansi Lal ordered the institution of some cases against Gupta a method he used with great abandon in the years to come The cases instituted, the Superintendent of Police was asked to arrest Gupta But it was not all that easy Gupta, apart from being the PCC chief, was also a member of Parliament He approached Y B Chavan, the then Home Minister, who in turn telephoned Nanda and told him to ensure that Gupta was not arrested It would create political complications But before Nanda could contact Bansi Lal, he had "disappeared" Nobody seemed to know where he was

Sareen got a telephone call from Nanda "Gupta must not be arrested," Nanda ordered "You must see to it"

Sareen telephoned the Superintendent of Police, Mahendragarh,

the place where the arrest was to be made "People have already been asked to arrest Guptaji," the SP said

"No, no, please stop the arrest," Sareen pressed He explained to the SP the background against which he was making the request "Don't do it until you have met the Chief Minister"

It was nearly midnight when Sareen went to the Canal Rest House of the Haryana government where Bansi Lal was hiding, but he was not there He left a note informing the Chief Minister the circumstances in which Gupta's arrest had been stopped Sareen's "crimes" were mounting

Then one night Bansi Lal telephoned Sareen from Kashmir

"Fix up appointments for me with the editors of the *Times of India* and the *Statesman*," he ordered

"Sir, could I know what kind of appointments you want? Should I call them for dinner or something?"

You ask too many questions," came the irritated Haryanvi voice

' No Sir, I just wanted to know whether it's to be just a social get together or whether you wanted to discuss something specific with them They might want to know, Sir "

"*Shiqayat karni hai*" (I have to make a complaint), he said gruffly ' Their correspondents have been writing against me I have to set them right "

The newsman in Sareen was again at the top He thought this wouldn't be the right thing to do This may only prejudice the newspapers further Besides, the correspondents in question were old colleagues of Sareen [illegible] been doing their [illegible]

"Sir, ple [illegible] said Sareen

' Do as you like," barked Bansi Lal and banged the phone

And then came the biggest fracas On the evening of 30 October 1968, *Jashn e Haryana* was celebrated at Faridabad to mark the second anniversary of the state's creation In his speech, the Chief Guest, S Nijalingappa, who was then the Congress President, proclaimed that Bansi Lal s government would not fall so long as he was the head of the Congress Bansi Lal had done everything he could to win the support of Nijalingappa and now here he was publicly declaring his blessings That was a million dollar declaration for Bansi Lal and he expected to see it splashed in big bold headlines in all the Delhi newspapers next morning Sareen had

taken care to carry a well chosen press party to the Faridabad function Proper coverage was ensured, but the celebrations had continued till almost midnight and there had been much wining and dining The pressmen had mutually agreed to hold the story for the night

At 6 40 next morning, Sareen's phone started ringing Drowsily he picked up the receiver and got a shock "You sabotaged the news," somebody shouted full blast

"Who is speaking? ' Sareen asked

"I am not Who! I am Bansi Lal '

"Good morning, Sir "

"*Good morning ka bachcha Itni bhi khabar gol kar di tumne?*' barked Bansi Lal

"Sir, let me just explain "

"I don't listen to explanations "

"Sir, the fact is " Again he was cut short

"Fact What fact? I know what the fact is This has become the centre of a conspiracy against me and *you* are masterminding it '

"But please listen to me I shall explain I ll satisfy you '

"Who the hell are you to satisfy me?"

"But please listen to me, Sir "

"You are trying to overawe me with English, you '

"Sir, whether you listen to me in Hindi or in English I would just like to tell you "

"Who the hell are you to tell me anything? ' roared the Chief Minister

"*Aap malik hain* " (you are the master)

"That I am, and not because you say so "

"Whatever you order, Sir "

"Order? I am going to order your dismissal "

"In that case what can I say, Sir?"

"*Tu gustakhi se bolta hai? Bahen* " (You talk impertinently? You)

It was getting too much, but still Sareen tried to keep his cool He said "Sir, you are the Chief Minister and I am obliged to show an attitude of respect towards you, but I am not used to this kind of language It becomes impossible "

' Oh yes, I will call you a *Bahen* You are a *Bahen* You are a *Bahen* " He was literally shrieking, almost in hysterics

Sareen couldn't hold himself any longer "Are you a Chief

Mınıster or a bloody street dog ?" He gave ıt back to hım, full blast

Bansı Lal banged the receıver He cancelled all hıs engagements in Delhı, rushed back to Chandıgarh, and sacked Sareen the same evenıng A specıal mess›nger served the order on hım next day

Sareen went ın wrıt petıtıon ın Delhı Hıgh Court, challengıng the order At the end of the long legal wrangle that followed, the judge observed "I am not ımpressed by the denıal of respondent [Bansı Lal] and would rather prefer the petıtıoner's [Rajendra Sareen] versıon It would appear that hıs denıal ıs, to say the least, dısıngenuous " The case had thoroughly exposed Bansı Lal as an untruthful man who had no compunctıon ın makıng false statements on oath

The horrors of the Emergency were nothıng new for Haryana It had been under the grıp of a monstrous rule from long before Bansı Lal ruled over the state through a small coterıe of polıtı cıans and offıcıals as unscrupulous as hımself Many find ıt dıffıcult to decıde who of the two was worse Bansı Lal or hıs alter ego, S K Mısra In thıs young IAS officer from Kanpur, first ıntroduced to hım by hıs chum, Lalıt Narayan Mıshra, Bansı Lal had found an excellent partner

Wıth hıs long sıdeburns and thıck moustache, thıs faır and slım young man dressed ın smartly taılored safarı suıts or gaudy bush shırts looked more lıke a Box-wallah than a bureaucrat He seldom smıled ın publıc and when he dıd ıt was more a grın than a smıle Back ın the Unıversıty of Allahabad, Mısra had been a quıet, sober student, never very great at raggıng the freshers ın the hostel whıch had quıte a reputatıon for ıts atrocıous raggıng Hıs frıends who knew hım then would find ıt hard to ımagıne hım in the new role he assumed under, or rather ın partnershıp wıth Bansı Lal

There was hardly anythıng ın Bansı Lal's Nawabdom that was not under thıs young man's purvıew Apart from beıng the Chıef Mınıster's Prıncıpal Secretary, he was concurrently Secretary of half a dozen departments Accordıng to the Unıon Home Mınıstry's ınstructıons, no IAS officer could hold more than one cadre post at a tıme for more than a year The rulers of Haryana had theır own way of cırcumventıng the rule Mısra was sent on

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Bansi Lal banged the receiver He cancelled all his engagements in Delhi, rushed back to Chandigarh, and sacked Sareen the same evening A special messenger served the order on him next day

Sareen went in writ petition in Delhi High Court, challenging the order At the end of the long legal wrangle that followed, the judge observed "I am not impressed by the denial of respondent [Bansi Lal] and would rather prefer the petitioner's [Rajendra Sareen] version It would appear that his denial is, to say the least, disingenuous " The case had thoroughly exposed Bansi Lal as an untruthful man who had no compunction in making false statements on oath

The horrors of the Emergency were nothing new for Haryana It had been under the grip of a monstrous rule from long before Bansi Lal ruled over the state through a small coterie of politicians and officials as unscrupulous as himself Many find it difficult to decide who of the two was worse Bansi Lal or his alter ego, S K Misra In this young IAS officer from Kanpur, first introduced to him by his chum, Lalit Narayan Mishra, Bansi Lal had found an excellent partner

[illegible] it was more a grin than a smile Back in the University of Allahabad, Misra had been a quiet, sober student, never very great at ragging the freshers in the hostel which had quite a reputation for its atrocious ragging His friends who knew him then would find it hard to imagine him in the new role he assumed under, or rather in partnership with Bansi Lal

There was hardly anything in Bansi Lal's Nawabdom *that was* not under this young man's purview Apart from being the Chief Minister's Principal Secretary, he was concurrently Secretary of half a dozen departments According to the Union Home Ministry's instructions, no IAS officer could hold more than one cadre post at a time for more than a year. The rulers of Haryana had their own way of circumventing the rule Misra was sent on

a jaunt abroad, of course at government expenses, while some dummies kept his seats hot for him He returned and assumed command over all the departments again, and at the end of another year he was off again to a foreign land Perhaps no other IAS officer in the country would have made as many trips abroad on such frivolous assignments as Misra during his years of glory in Haryana He was a comparatively junior officer, with many years to go before he could become a Commissioner But Bansi Lal did not believe in rules and delays, not when they stood in the way of his favourites Without much ado he promoted Misra to Commissioner's rank, and with him all others who would otherwise have been superseded

Another member of the Bansi Lal caucus was R C Mehtani who, like Indira Gandhi's R K Dhawan, was just a steno-typist when Bansi Lal took over But he proved to be such an invaluable hatchetman that he was soon promoted to the provincial civil service Then onwards he just raced upwards he jumped to a new scale every few months it seemed, but he could hardly have bothered about the pay scales That was peanuts for a man who handled most of the big deals of the rapacious ruler of Haryana The Nawab of Loharu had been left far behind

No officer or politician who did not surrender to the Misra-Mehtani axis could have any future in Bansi Lal s Haryana Between the two they organized a vast espionage network in the state, and used it to locate and stifle any opposition anywhere in the state In the first six and a half years of Bansi Lal s rule (the period before the Emergency) the state police took into custody more than 143,000 people belonging to different walks of life There was hardly a recalcitrant political opponent who was not pushed into the jail on one pretext or the other

At one time one of the closest political associates of Bansi Lal was Chaudhuri Bhajan Lal now a Janata Party MP They were great friends and Bhajan Lal was considered the No 2 man in the state On some issue they fell out and a conspiracy was promptly hatched to bring Bhajan Lal down on his knees The Bansi Lal mafia got the Panipat police to force a woman of the area, Kailasi, to give a statement alleging that Bhajan Lal had raped her That did it Bhajan Lal knuckled down That done, the police were ordered to get another statement from the woman saying that her previous statement was false

Chaudhuri Dharam Singh was an old and respected lawyer of Panipat He committed the crime of denouncing the corrupt and atrocious rule of Bansi Lal at a public meeting also addressed by Chaudhuri Charan Singh, now the Union Home Minister Bansi Lal's orders went out to the Panipat police The old man was arrested, stripped naked, his face was tarred, and in this state he was dragged all through the streets of the town The policemen kept kicking him with their boots all the way When a complaint was made to Bansi Lal, he smiled and ordered the promotion of the police officers

The boorish Gauleiter of Haryana had a pathological hatred for anything that had to do with intellect or culture He couldn't stand scholars or educationists or artists To him they were all "parasites" Least of all could he stand journalists, particularly the ones who would not cringe and crawl before him As the Defence Minister later he was to boast at a press conference at Lucknow that "we have brought newspapermen down to the level where they ought to be"—the "drain level"

Ten months before the Emergency, Bansi Lal and his goons wreaked such vengeance on a Bhiwani newspaper which had had the guts to criticize his barbarous ways that one could only wonder if this country has ever really been a democracy It all started on a July evening in 1974 Suddenly a senior officer of the municipality arrived at the office of the *Chetna* with a gang of about 30 workmen armed with spades and crowbars They at once started knocking down a front portion of the building The Manager, Rabindranath Vasisht, protested and told them that the required penalty for the extra construction had already been paid to the municipality and the authorization had been received Besides, the Editor was away, and if they insisted on the demolition could they please come later?

The Municipal Officer took the Manager aside and told him "Look, we are not interested in damaging you If you want to get out of this hassle all you have to do is to stop writing against the Chief Minister and his men If your Editor is willing to give a written undertaking that he will stop his tirade I assure you no harm will come to the newspaper"

Rabindranath Vasisht and his son, Devabrata Vasisht, who was the newspaper's Editor, refused to give any such undertaking. "We are running a newspaper, not a Bania shop," they told the

officer who had made the suggestion To break his morale, the old man was arrested and later released on bail

In the early hours of 26 June 1975 when the silence of a graveyard was descending on the country, policemen swooped on their home and arrested the Editor and his father They were implicated in 13 trumped up cases But the Vasishts were not to be cowed down so easily Devabrata's wife took charge of the newspaper and continued its publication

The demolition squads hammered away at the building and night after night goondas were let loose in the house to terrorize the women and children

On 29 June, the district officers of Hissar summoned the 17-year-old son of Devabrata Vasisht and told him "If you and your mother give us in writing that henceforth your paper will not publish anything against Bansi Lal and his men we shall release your father and grandfather Otherwise " Where many a great editor of the country had knuckled down at the very word "Emergency," there were some here and there who still valued their pen

On the evening of 20 February 1976, the boy was brutally attacked outside his gate The electric bulb on the street had been smashed In the dark, the assailants came down on the boy with iron rods, chains, lathis, and belts For six hours the boy lay bleeding The police refused to record the first information report, the local doctors were too frightened to give even first aid to the boy It was only very reluctantly that a doctor later agreed to go to the house in a curtained car The dying boy was carried to the Rohtak Medical College and it was 31 hours after the attack that he regained consciousness

The attack had allegedly been "supervised" by Surinder Singh, the second son of Bansi Lal Thirty-year-old Surinder was the virtual Nawab of Bhiwani, a mini Gauleiter, in many ways more crude and brutal than his father

By a strange coincidence, the notorious son of Partap Singh Kairon (a former Chief Minister of Punjab who was indicted for corruption by the Das Commission of Inquiry and was shot dead on a highway) was also Surinder by name Bansi Lal had tried to fashion himself after Kairon and his son perhaps had made Surinder Kairon his hero But as one Chandigarh journalist said, it would be an insult to Partap Singh Kairon to compare Bansi

Lal to him In spite of all his faults, Kairon was a man with human qualities whereas Bansi Lal was untouched by anything human He was certainly as inferior to Kairon as his great protector, Indira Gandhi, was to Kairon's protector, Jawaharlal Nehru

If Indira Gandhi protected Bansi Lal unto the last it was not because she was unaware of his great deeds or because she believed that he was an innocent lamb being pilloried by a savage opposition Over the years at least three long, documented charge sheets had been submitted to the union government against the man Her own dossier on Bansi Lal, prepared by her very own espionage agency, euphemistically called the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), was spilling over with the black deeds of her favourite satrap She knew, perhaps better than anybody else, his shady antecedents and his shadier present She knew very well how he had kidnapped, jailed, and bribed legislators to keep the facade of a democratic majority in the state, she knew how Bansi Lal and his men had fleeced and tortured the people of Haryana; she knew of all the vulgar atrocities perpetrated by Surinder Singh and his goon squad, she knew of the Rewasa outrage in all its gruesome details

She knew all this and more, and yet she could not act Not because it was in her character to stand by her supporters through fire and brimstone Far from it She could ditch her closest of mates at the first sign of danger to herself She protected Bansi Lal, not even because he was of immense use to her, the 30 years of benign Congress rule, benign most of all to underworld characters who passed as politicians and leaders, had brought to the surface many a scum who could be used by her as effectively as she used Bansi Lal Lalit Narayan Mishra, may his soul rest in peace, had once been of great use to Indira Gandhi, but was she any the poorer with him gone?

None of these reasons was strong enough for Indira Gandhi to protect Bansi Lal the way she did She protected him because she had no choice In the ultimate analysis it was easier for Bansi Lal to ditch Indira Gandhi, he had no reputation to lose The world would not have cared if a wayward son of some "unreliable" Jat called Mohar Singh ended up where he belonged But could the world say the same about Nehru's only child, the woman who

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was so recently deified as Durga?

What if Bansi Lal chose to throw up the tapes of his tete-a tete on phone with the famous mother and the son? What if the man, who had so little to lose, chose to make public the tell tale pictures of the prince at the famous Pinjore Garden which he had kept so well equipped at all times for the honoured guest? No, the man had to be shielded and protected It was better to hang together than hang separately

Bansi Lal knew his strength He even boasted about it in his own crude way "I have taken possession of the Calf and naturally the Cow is always at my beck and call "

"*Fiqar na karo bettaji Zameen ki kya chinta hai?*" (Don't you worry, son Why do you bother about land?) he had told Sanjay Gandhi when the boy was looking around for land to set up his factory Bansi Lal not only got him the land for a song but a good part of the cement and iron and other building materials He also got his pal, Vidya Charan Shukla, who was then Minister for Defence Production, to overrule objections that the land was too close to an Air Force depot

When Sanjay failed to manufacture cars and the factory faced closure, Bansi Lal ordered the Haryana State Transport Corporation to give all the contracts for building bus bodies to Maruti Ltd If Sanjay Gandhi needed anything, he had just to dial Bansi Lal Like Aladin's djinn he was quick with whatever the prince desired

An inhuman mixture of cruelty and subservience, Bansi Lal wormed his way through the boy into the innermost ring of power "After Indira Gandhi it will be none other than you, my son," he never tired of telling Sanjay Gandhi

When the political challenge to Indira Gandhi's supremacy mounted, Bansi Lal told Indira Gandhi "Pack them in the jails There are plenty in my Haryana You have just to order I can fix them all in a day " He was Indira Gandhi's Idi Amin Dada

For him, 12 June 1975 was a godsend He was in his element, bubbling with a sense of *deja vu* "We should have taught them [the opposition leaders] a lesson long back," he told one of his close associates that evening "Never let serpents raise their heads Crush them at the first opportunity "

As the Chosen One of the "heir apparent" Bansi Lal was too far away from the court He had to be brought close, and the post

where he could be of greatest use to Sanjay Gandhi was of Defence Minister About that time the Army had been pressing for heavy duty vehicles of over 20 tonne capacity and several international firms were keen to enter into a collaboration with an Indian company The Vice-President of a West German firm had visited the Maruti factory and had almost entered into an agreement under which they would have transferred their plant from West Germany to Maruti on a turnkey basis

The deal was almost through, but there was one big hurdle the Defence Ministry With Bansi Lal there, everything would go smoothly, thought the Young Master And so on 1 December 1975, the man from Gola Garh was sworn in as the Defence Minister Of course, he did not have to lose control over Haryana, he planted one of his puppets there

When asked about the smooth transition in Haryana, Bansi Lal told a *press conference at the Lucknow Raj Bhawan in* January 1976 "He [B D Gupta] was my trusted chela I put him there and came here, that's all I am just a chaprasi of Indira Gandhi If she likes she can put me in a car or if she wants she can drop me on the road "

It was a very exclusive "press conference" arranged by one of Bansi Lal's former *chamchas who had been a correspondent in* Haryana Just five selected newsmen to gather all the gems falling from the great Defence Minister's mouth Of course, none of the gems could get into print, the newspapers had all been brought down to the "gutter-level"

The first impression that the man gave when he walked into the room was that of an unshaped boat launched into water in great hurry crude and awkward Someone started with a question on defence preparedness and he blustered "Defence? We can crush our enemies into rubble "

But obviously he had not gone to Lucknow to talk about defence He quickly came to the point "Narayan Dutt Tewari will remain Chief Minister for at least five years You write it Who is from the radio? You? Have it broadcast on the radio What? Why can't it be done? This is the Defence Minister ordering you I'll talk to your Director General Well, this is what I have come to tell you all Nobody can remove Narayan Dutt Tewari for at least five years Do you understand?"

About the same time, his Young Master had given a similar

certificate to his great crony in Bihar, Jagannath Mishra, the younger brother of Lalit Narayan Mishra "Jagannath Mishra will remain the Chief Minister for ten to fifteen years" had been the prince's blessing

But to return to the *Raksha Mantri*'s gems

> I don't approve of journalists Once I gave a hard slap to what's-his name calls himself a special correspondent Special, my foot My security man told me I had done just the right thing He wanted to know if I had done his work Was I the Chief Minister or a servant? What was the work? There was a woman there in Chandigarh, some deputy director of something Nonsense Both this man and another chap from the *Tribune* used to fuck this woman They went and wrote an editorial against me I told the *thana* [police station] not to let the news paper pass that way Just burn them I ordered This is what you get when you pick enmity with Chief Minister This journalist had been a friend of mine at one time I had done many things for him So many orders on files Do you know what I did? Just went to Chandigarh and passed just the opposite orders on all the files .

Behind him all the time stood a poker faced S K Misra Never a smile on his face, never any reaction

One reporter hazarded the question "Sir, it is said you are very close to Sanjay Gandhi and with him you are shaping the destiny of the nation "

"*Dekkho*,' replied the Defence Minister in his uncouth Haryanvi, "*ab second line of leadership honi chahiye, isko lok samajhte nahi kya bura hai? Maine Bahenji [Indira Gandhi] se bhi kaha bakne diyiye logon ko mere larke ke khilaf bhi bakte hain log mere khilaf JP bhi ghoom ke dekh liya janta ne jo usko batai puchcho mat jail me band kar diya ek patta bhi nahi kharka ab dekkho maine aur Sanjay dono ne Bahenji se kaha* " (Look there must be a second line of leadership, but people don't understand this what s wrong with it? I even told Bahenji [Indira Gandhi] not to care for the barking dogs people shout against my son too JP too went around against me and understood it don't ask me how the people treated him threw him into the jail and not a leaf stirred Now look, both Sanjay and I told Bahenji)

He was about to go on, perhaps reveal something vital, but just at this point S K Misra moved up to him, whispered something in his ear and in a huff the press conference broke up Bansi Lal suddenly got up and left, followed by his alter ego, Misra, whom he had brought to Delhi as "Joint Secretary to the *Raksha Mantri*"!

It was a very special kind of relationship, between Bansi Lal and his favourite officials Bansi Lal would often go to the house of one of his favourites and the first thing he would do is to swap abuses with the officer's little son

"You bastard," Bansi Lal would shout to the little boy "Trying to behave like an IAS officer's brat? '

And the little boy would retort "You son of a gun, trying to be the Defence Minister?"

An Army General who had one day accompanied the Defence Minister felt so embarrassed at the exchange of abuses between the 50 year old man and the little boy that he withdrew In rushed the officer's wife and drove the boy away

"Let the boy learn this language, ' Bansi Lal told her "It will make him bold and adventurous"

"That's not my way of bringing up my children," she retorted, much to the annoyance of her husband

Bansi Lal and Misra were inseparable Both had their families Much before Bansi Lal became a great *nasbandi* crusader he had produced two sons and four daughters, all *shahzadas* and *shahzadis* of Haryana But in a way neither Bansi Lal nor Misra was held by any strong family ties Bansi Lal had got a Congress ticket for Misra's wife and she had got elected to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly (the previous one) She spent most of her time in Lucknow, while her husband took care of Bansi Lal's "conscience"

With them they brought a "new wave" to the Defence Ministry corridors in South Block Army officers looked aghast as pot-bellied [illegible]
[illegible] and
out of [illegible]
Joint S [illegible] sonal
[illegible] had
materia[illegible] Defence Minister s room, much to the dismay and curiosity of the uniformed personnel.

What shocked them most was the Defence Minister's crude and overbearing manners Whether he was dealing with a jawan or a non commissioned officer or with the Chief of Staff, he went about as though they were all his serfs

At an official lunch at the Ashoka Hotel in honour of the Czechoslovak Defence Minister who was visiting India, Bansi Lal looked at the group of officers standing around him and said "Here you are, the Chiefs of the Navy and the Air Force But where is the Army Chief? Somebody go find him "

The Air Marshal rushed to the other end of the banquet hall where Gen Raina was talking to a foreign dignitary

When the Chief of Army Staff came in sight, Bansi Lal said loudly, "Ah, Raina Saheb, where do you keep yourself in hiding all the time? ' His sarcastic tone was not lost on the people around who had turned to see what was happening

The General greeted the Minister very correctly, but Bansi Lal carried on in his own bumptious way "Whenever I ask for you they say you are out on tour Come and see me in the office tomorrow " The tone was both rude and crude

He was not the only bull in a china shop His favourites, too, threw their weight around One day, R C Mehtani ordered for tea from the army canteen in the South Block When the tea came, he did not like the look of the crockery and burst out "Is this the way to bring tea? ' The bearer said he better talk to the Manager, who happened to be an honorary Lt Col Call him, I will fix him," shouted Mehtani

When he talked to the Manager in the same vein, the Army man gave it back to him "I'll see that you are dismissed, Mehtani threatened

That very day the Defence Minister sent a note to the Army Chief asking him to dismiss the Manager The Army Chief wrote back that there was no provision for such dismissals Bansi Lal sent the file to the Prime Minister and Sanjay Gandhi intervened on Mehtani s behalf Eventually, the Lt Col was posted out of Delhi A minor incident, but it had fouled the atmosphere in South Block

Bansi Lal was up to more serious deals He sent off a senior Air Force officer to Sweden twice in quick succession to finalize a Rs 300 crore deal for the purchase of fighter bomber aircrafts which were known to be full of defects Misra, too, had been sent

abroad in connection with the deal, in which Sanjay Gandhi's pay-off was allegedly going to be 10 per cent of the total cost! The Lok Sabha elections ruined it all

In totality, it was an ugly face, ugly on the outside, uglier within But it would be futile to single him out for condemnation and forget the putrid soil that gave birth to such a man Bansi Lal was not just a political freak, he was in a sense just a well-marked example of a type that could be met throughout society If a vulgar man could get to a position where he could put his idiocies into practice, the people at large can hardly escape at least part of the responsibility For the truth is that a people must first be in a condition to be led astray before it can abandon itself to such crudities as Bansi Lal or V C Shukla

3

V.C. Shukla: The Playboy Goebbels

To compare Vidya Charan Shukla to Joseph Goebbels is to insult the great Nazi manipulator of minds For Dr Goebbels was an astonishingly gifted propagandist of modern times, the real creator of the Fuhrer cult Goebbels had brains, and that was the difference Having no mind, Shukla brought with him police batons to beat minds out of existence and succeeded in totally destroying the credibility of the government and his masters He was more of a Himmler than a Goebbels, utterly mediocre and utterly vain like the Gestapo Chief But let it pass, it would do no harm to call him a Goebbels, nobody would mind an insult to Hitler's drum beater

Within hours of taking over as Indira Gandhi's Minister for Propaganda he was strutting through the corridors of Shastri Bhawan, a fawning lot of officers-turned menials scampering behind him "Look, you fellows have very wrong ideas," he lectured cockily to the officers, all craning their necks to get every word of their new boss "You will have to reorient your thinking Your old ways won't do with me You better understand that right now"

In a 70-minute sermon to the Station Directors of All India Radio and other media heads, the Emergency's Propaganda Chief pronounced "All officers must scrutinize and screen all their subordinates Exhaustive lists should be prepared of the infidels ."

The great Defender of the Faith had stepped into the conference room jauntily, in steel grey safari suit, his eyes stony under the glint of his glasses, his face flushed with his new sense of power. His flock sat poker-faced, like stone figures, only those at the back exchanging furtive glances as the long soliloquy proceeded "A detailed record of editors and correspondents should be prepared Their antecedents should be noted, ever since they entered the profession, and they should be told that the government knows all about them I want their records in less than 14 days The Prime Minister wants it"

There was a tense calm in the hall, but those who could view the situation in the right perspective could not help being amused Behind the high and mighty posture of this man, behind all his perkiness, there was the real Shukla, himself a fawning minion who kowtowed every morning and evening before the rising son of India You could see he was trying hard to live up to the role assigned to him, he was going to swing the hatchet hard

That was why he had been put in the place of Inder Kumar Gujral, considered too soft and gentle to hammer sense into an irreverent press Gujral, at one time a close associate of Indira Gandhi, had not thought it essential to pay court to the prince This had enraged the Young Master and he had often described Gujral as "a mere drawing room conversationalist" Mohammad Yunus and some others in the court had also started creating an atmosphere against Gujral "He is not using the media for you," they often told Indira Gandhi These critics of Gujral got a big handle against him on the day the Supreme Court gave a stay order against the operation of the Allahabad High Court judgement against Mrs Gandhi While the English news bulletin of the AIR had led by saying that the Supreme Court had upheld the continuance of Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister, the Hindi bulletin highlighted the riders to the stay order

Apart from the row over the AIR bulletin, Sanjay Gandhi had other complaints against Gujral He had wanted, even before the Emergency, that the *Motherland* should be closed down, but Gujral had pointed out that there was no provision under which they could do this At best, the newspaper could be sued for libel, he said

On the second day of the Emergency, Gujral got a telephone call from Sanjay Gandhi's Secretary asking him to come to No 1

Safdarjang Road at 10 A M Gujral got delayed in a meeting and reached the Prime Minister's house 40 minutes late

Sanjay Gandhi came to the drawing room, looking at his watch angrily "This won't do," he said curtly

"What do you mean?" Gujral asked

"I had asked you to come at 10 o'clock *Ye sab nahi chalega*" (all this won't do)

"*Zaroor chalega*" (it will most certainly do), Gujral said firmly The insolence of the boy whom he had seen grow up hurt him "Look, you are like my son," he said "I have for long been a political associate of your mother, your father was a friend of mine "

Sanjay Gandhi rose and stalked out of the room

Some time later, Om Mehta, the mindless servant of the court who had become the de facto Home Minister, telephoned Gujral and told him to send all the AIR bulletins and political scripts to Sanjay Gandhi before they went on the air Gujral said that apart from the impropriety of doing this, it was physically impossible Often there was not enough time to do this "But these are the orders," Om Mehta said "If you have any objection in sending them to Sanjayji, send them to me " Many times the scripts that went to No 1 Safdarjang Road never came back The Big Censor sat over them

The same evening Mohammad Yunus rang up Gujral and complained that the BBC had carried some "blasphemous news" on India Gujral made inquiries and found that the BBC had done nothing of the sort Then came a call from the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, R K Dhawan "The Prime Minister wants to see you "

She had looked very irritated and the moment he entered she brought up the BBC report on India Gujral said he had double checked and found nothing objectionable

"No, no, you leave it," she said in a huff "Now we have gone into Emergency This is not a normal situation We want someone who can deal with the media with a stern hand Vidya would be the right man in the new situation "

Gujral said calmly, "You are the Prime "

He was cut short "You hand over charge tomorrow " She had picked up one of the telephones, one of her ways of indicating that the audience was over

Gujral told his wife that night that they would be going away for a month's holiday But the next morning, he got a call from the Prime Minister "I have decided you should go to the Planning Ministry "

Aware that he had been brought to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to "deliver the goods," Shukla harangued his officers "You have to act as constant watchdogs against saboteurs and the feedback has to be prompt The government relies on you This is a testing time I don't want any betrayal The government has its own method of finding out the fifth columns within the services "

To implement his threats Shukla brought to the Ministry his loyal police officer, K N Prasad, as Officer on Special Duty with an Additional Secretary's salary Some called him "Shukla's bull dog " He was short, dark and pugnacious, just the man to bamboozle the media Prasad had served in the Central Intelligence Bureau and at one time he had been sent abroad for training in "International Communism," perhaps just a cover for a training in CIA/KGB tactics He had worked under Shukla in the Ministry of Defence Production and had been an "excellent informer " He always passed on intelligence reports and juicy tit-bits about men in power to Shukla who in turn used the information to create an impression on Dev Kant Barooah, Rajni Patel, and Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the men to whom he owed his elevation in Indira's court

It was the Barooah-Rajni Siddhartha axis which had promoted Shukla and it was on their recommendation that he had been given charge of the Gujarat Assembly elections in May 1975 There he had created the impression on Indira Gandhi of being "young, strong, dynamic, and loyal " It was this same group, again, which worked on Indira Gandhi to make him the Information and Broadcasting Minister He would be the right man in the new situation, they had said, and she agreed

But hard though he tried, Shukla could never get into the inner circle at the court He was servile to Sanjay Gandhi, taking orders from him morning and evening, carrying the Ministry's files to him for his clearance, going out of way to propagate the words of the Young Master through the AIR, TV, and the press And yet, Sanjay Gandhi never really trusted him beyond a point, he knew of Shukla's liaison with the group of politicians he hated, he had

kept track of Shukla's nocturnal revelries with these men in Ashoka Hotel and other places, he might have even been a little envious of him

Politically, Shukla had always been a great "ditcher" In 1962, when Nehru had started losing his grip on the party, Shukla had been a campaigner against him At that time he was trying hard to curry favour with Yashvantrao Balwantrao Chavan who was then being hailed as a "second Shivaji" and a possible alternative to Nehru Later when Indira Gandhi came to power he began courting the Prime Minister's blue-eyed boy, Dinesh Singh With him he would go to the Oberoi Intercontinental Hotel where he kept a suite of rooms

The stories of his misdoings were too well known even then Indira Gandhi had heard of Shukla's "extra curricular" activities, but they did not make any difference to her And soon people *in the party and the government came to believe that the more* unsavoury a man's private life the better his chances of continuing in grace

By the time Dinesh Singh fell from grace, Shukla had ingratiated himself with Umashankar Dixit For a couple of years he remained under cloud but through constant lobbying and sycophancy he kept afloat When he found that Dixit was fading out of power he hitched himself to the Barooah Rajni Siddhartha wagon Together they made quite a bunch of playboys!

In the meantime he was also anxious to establish a link with the emerging power at court And for this he used the services of Gufrain Azam, a chum of Sanjay Gandhi The Gujarat elections gave him the break he needed It was during this election that he made out a case against Gujral that he was "not using the media in favour of the Congress"

Now here he was, teaching the media men how they must conduct themselves He howled against the opposition leaders, went hysterical in condemning Jayaprakash Narayan, and warned "Remember, his utterances are things of the past, not a word any more Remember, Mrs Gandhi is our leader More than 600 million people of India adore her Even a whisper against her is treason Any unfavourable reference to people connected with her is unpatriotic The image of our leader should not only be protected but brightened day in and day out "

"You fellows," he went on jauntily, "don't realize that the

government is the party You should make no distinction between the two "

At this point, one Station Director of the AIR got up from his seat and said "But Sir, under the rules we have to make a distinction between the two "

Shukla looked hard at the officer, his face flushed with rage His lips twitched over his buck teech "I didn't ask you to work for the party," he said "But you must understand that the ruling party is the government and the ruling party's policies are the government's policies You have to implement these policies Make no mistake about it "

Within a week the "impertinent" officer was transferred

The real enemy to be dealt with was the press Within days of taking over, Shukla summoned newspaper editors from various parts of the country "I hope all of you will follow the rules and co operate with the government," he told them imperiously, his nose in the air When some courageous editor of a provincial newspaper pointed out the mindless manner in which some of the censors were operating, Shukla said "These steps are irreversible The press, like everyone else, will just have to live with them "

On 29 June 1975, Shukla called the foreign journalists to Shastri Bhawan and told them that any correspondent not complying with censorship regulations would be subjected to "very stern and stiff action" which could mean expulsion "This is not a threat or a warning Just a statement of fact in plain language "

Sitting in the front row was Lewis Simons, the young, bearded correspondent of the *Washington Post* He was taking down every word in his notebook

Shukla looked at him hard and asked "Why are you writing this down? '

"Because you are saying it!" replied Simons

' No, no, this is not for reporting," the Minister said Simons went on writing

Over 50 foreign journalists sat in the hall, watching the arrogant performance of the Indian version of Goebbels

"You will be judged not only on the basis of your despatches," Shukla said, "but also on the basis of what your newspapers write [that drew some chuckles from the audience] and on our Home Ministry files on you " This last idea he must have got from his

loyal cop who sat beside him with a "constipated scowl on his face "[1]

The Minister went on to talk about the professional ethics of journalists This was more than some people could take from this arrogant man A tall, white haired correspondent of BBC, who must surely have seen many a tin pot dictator in his reporting career, got up from his seat to interject "We have our professional ethics but what you are talking doesn't have ethics of any kind" That drew an applause from the crowd, it had provided a great relief amidst the insufferable lecture

As the conference ended and the foreign journalists began leaving, the Indian reporters working for foreign newspapers were asked to stay on They were given an extra stern warning

The very next day, Lewis Simons got a long distance call from his Editor in Washington "You better expect to be expelled from the country," the Editor told him [2]

The Indian Embassy in Washington had got in touch with the *Washington Post* Editor and told him to recall Simons from India or else he might have to be deported The Editor had replied that he saw no reason why he should recall his correspondent

What had enraged the Indian government against Simons was his report on the 18 June rally of Indira Gandhi at New Delhi Boat Club Quoting "military sources" Simons had written that the Defence Minister Swaran Singh had requested the Army to deploy soldiers in civilian dress for security purposes at the rally, and that the Army had turned down the request saying that if soldiers were to be deployed for security they had to be in their uniforms

This bit of information, which Simons thought was interesting, was tucked away somewhere in the midst of his long despatch If he had known that the Indira Gandhi government would zero in on that bit of fact, perhaps he wouldn't have used it, or perhaps he might have led the story with it, since it was all that important But in any case, he had written the story when India was still a free country, he had never imagined that the situation would get far worse here than even in Nazi Germany

Simons had been forewarned, but he could not quite figure out why they should deport him What had he done? Then he suddenly

[1]The impression of a foreign journalist who was in the meeting
[2]Louis Simons in an interview with the author

remembered that he had not gone through the usual formalities at the Foreigners' Registration Office where he was supposed to register himself every time he came into the country Being the Asian Correspondent of the *Washington Post* he had to keep flitting in and out of the country all the time When he remembered the slip, he rushed to the Foreigners' Registration Office

"Ah, Mr Simons! We are so happy to see you," exclaimed the officers at the Registration Office "We had been looking for you all over the place" They had been unable to locate Simons' new address in Delhi

They took him to another room and told him he must leave the country within 24 hours, in fact by the first available flight out of the country

"But supposing I refuse to go?" asked Simons He had been through various dictatorial countries but this was his first experience of this kind And this was happening to him in India of all places, the country which he had thought was like an oasis amidst a desert of tin-pot dictatorships

"Well, we are afraid, if you refuse to leave you might have to be arrested," said the officer, himself looking upset by what he was having to do

Simons got a little emotional "What do you think you are doing to your country? Turning it into another Nazi empire?"

That shook the old white haired officer He shut both his ears with his palms and said in a choked voice "Don't say it, don't say it" He was most upset

In any case, Simons was ordered to take the first flight going to Bangkok in the little hours of the night When he was going through the security check, the officers posted there took out all his notebooks, nearly three dozen of them, and confiscated all the ones that related to India Simons made a big fuss over it, and the officers got nasty "We will do as we please," they shouted "Go to your country and mind your own business"

When Simons finally got back his notebooks three or four months later, through the US Embassy, he found all the pages meticulously numbered and stamped!

One foreign correspondent described the way Shukla's censors functioned Two of them had gone to Shastri Bhawan to get their copies cleared The censor-on-duty toyed with a blue pencil as

his eyes scanned the typewritten sheets on top of his desk Suddenly he frowned, the pencil hovered over the paper and then he began scoring out one line after another

The correspondents nodded to each other as they waited to submit their own copies The censor looked up at them and took their reports Soon he was crossing out line after line The correspondent protested "Why have you crossed out the sentence dealing with the suspension of the fundamental rights? That's part of the official ordinance!"

The censor looked up and said "Because fundamental rights have not been suspended for the average person It applies only to people who have been detained They have no right to appeal to courts "

"But that means the fundamental rights have been suspended," the frustrated correspondent pleaded

"You are wrong," the censor replied, as he continued to strike out more sentences

"But why have you cut out the lines suggesting that the demonstrations against Mrs Gandhi have fizzled out? ' the correspondent asked, his voice rising to a higher pitch

"Because nobody would want to plan a demonstration against the Prime Minister in the first place And by the way, you cannot pass this message informing your Editor that this report has been censored "

"But it has been censored," the correspondent remonstrated

"That does not matter. You cannot say it "

The frustrated correspondent next wanted to know why the phrase "Indira Gandhi was found guilty of corrupt practices during the 1971 elections" was being deleted when it was the verdict of the court

"Well, all right," said the censor, "I will pass that if you change 'corrupt practice' to read 'minor irregularities' or something to that effect "

"No," *said the correspondent adamantly "Just leave a blank* space there "

"But then the sentence will make no sense and the readers will know this has been censored You either change it or the entire report will be held back "

The correspondent snatched his report and marched out of the room

A week after his crushing defeat in his home constituency, Raipur in Madhya Pradesh, where he is often called "the Prince of Chhattisgarh" the 48-year-old Vidya Charan Shukla sat perkily in his custom-made leather cushioned swivel chair in his teak-wood panelled office room at No 7 Race Cource Road, New Delhi Beyond the glass panes stretched the green lawns with blooming flowers

Somebody appreciated the plush comfort of the orange leather-sofas, and the former Propaganda Minister said jauntily "They are my personal belongings I got this wood panelling also done at my own expense."

So he did, perhaps, but wouldn't he have to leave the house?

"Oh no, I will not leave it All they can do is ask for market rent. "

But wouldn't that be prohibitive? A very naive question, one soon realized

"Money is no problem for me," said Shukla with a stiff upper lip "I own the Allwyn Mercury Travel Agency and other business I was in business before I came to politics, you know" So he was On the gleaming bookshelf is a black briefcase with labels from Paris, London, Zurich—ready to leave any time! Some weeks later the national news agency, his own handiwork, was to hurt his *amour-propre* by reporting that his passport had been impounded along with those of Sanjay Gandhi, Dhirendra Brahmachari, and others He claimed this had brought down his "reputation and credit in political and social circle" What piqued him particularly was the fact that his name had been bracketed with "some other persons" whose passports had also been impounded That was the unkindest cut of all—to place him in the same category as Sanjay Gandhi!

In complaints filed in a New Delhi court, Shukla said he "belonged to a very well-to-do family, was a man of substance, and had always been held in high esteem by the people with whom he had been dealing, either as a minister or as a citizen and made a good mark [*sic*] as a parliamentarian .. "

He indeed was a man of "substance" His father, the white mustachioed Ravi Shankar Shukla, the first Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, had started his life as a down-at heel teacher and ended up having amassed such colossal wealth that his sons began their lives as "princes" Ravi Shankar Shukla was one of Nehru's

first loyal *jagirdars* to be denied the Congress ticket The story goes that when he came to New Delhi in 1970 for the distribution of tickets for Assembly elections he was confronted with his bank accounts Not to be given a ticket was too much of a shock for him He died soon after this "injustice"

While the senior prince of Chhattisgarh, Shyama Charan Shukla, went into politics and later became Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh the younger prince went into business Soon after Independence, many of the British firms operating in the central province (later Madhya Pradesh) sold off their companies almost for a song and many of these, including extensive mines and a Shikar Company based in Nagpur, were bought over by the Shuklas, the new rich of those days These companies not only enabled them to spin money fast but also to deposit their money in foreign banks

Vidya Charan carried his *nouveau riche* lifestyle to politics It is his lifestyle which he thinks has given the people a "wrong image" of him When a correspondent asked him, after his defeat of course, how he had come to acquire 'a reputation of being lecherous he said

> Maybe because I live well and dress well Until these post Emergency publications came out I was not even aware of possessing such an image Everybody in public life is vulnerable to such gossip Even Mahatma Gandhi was not spared of such accusations—people question him for walking with his arms on the shoulders of two women It s a false image and all untrue If one lives in a certain style which is not luxurious but is correct, for instance I like a proper study, a proper leather cushioned chair and would certainly like a good view of the garden when I am studying, but this may be interpreted by others as wrong as a man who is an elitist in his approach [3]

He said if he needed a haircut he went to the Oberoi Intercontinental and he swam in the pool there "If this is considered lecherous what can I do?' Can a comfortable leather chair or a good view of the garden or a swim in the Intercontinental pool make a man lecherous? Or can these things by themselves make

[3] *India Today*, 1 15 June 1977

one sophisticated and polished?

Much as though he could boast about his "lifestyle" all his sophistication and polish were just a veneer The moment you peeled off a layer or two from the smooth image, you laid bare the man's real features—as crude, boorish, and ruthless as Bansi Lal or Sanjay Gandhi. Indeed, the three of them operated on the same wavelength That he could never get as close to the court as Bansi Lal must have been one of Shukla's greatest despairs

The moment Shukla stepped into Shastri Bhawan he set his sights on Bombay, the filmland That was to be his real playground in the next 19 months Driving from the Santa Cruz airport into Bombay city one day, Shukla's eyes got stuck on a huge wayside hoarding spilling over with inviting flesh Must have caused a flutter in his heart but at a meeting with film producers later that evening he assumed the posture of a great purist ' Who is this Ramanand Sagar? ' he haughtily demanded Sagar raised his hand meekly and rose from his seat "I have seen hoardings of *Charas* on my way from the airport," barked Shukla "How dare you advertise the film before it is censored? Such films are alien to our culture I'll see to it that it is not passed " Sagar had gone ashen Was this the end of his Rs 80 lakh star studded extravaganza?

The very next day the film was passed by the censor A film correspondent wrote "What transpired during that *kali rat* [dark night] is not known What priceless treasures were offered by Ramanand to get his Rs 80 lakh starrer passed is also not known Only the four walls of Shukla's hotel suite were the mute witnesses "[4]

This great crusader against sex and violence in films turned most permissive when it came to *Sholay*, which became the epitome of filmy sex and violence Cowardly as all bullies are, Shukla never even mentioned the name of this film, because it featured a close friend of Sanjay Gandhi Amitabh Bachchan, often called "the Sanjay of Filmland," was not only a friend of the Prince but the son of Teji Bachchan, a favourite of Jawaharlal Nehru and a friend of Indira Gandhi Shukla was discreet enough not to show any bravado about *Sholay* There were lots of other

[4]*Film Mirror*, May 1977

pastures free for him, and a friendly G P Sippy was any day an asset for such a pathological case

At a rumbustious party thrown by film producer G P Sippy, Shukla met a curvacious beauty called Vijaykumari, Candy for short, with ambitions to become a star Shukla thought she was a "striking personality ' and he was certainly in a position to help her achieve her ambition

Sometime in August 1976, according to a Bombay journal,[5] a Mercedes halted in front of the office of N V K Murthy, the then Director of the Film and Television Institute, Poona, and from it emerged G P Sippy and an attractive girl in blue jeans, yellow top, scarf and sunglasses The next thing people in the Institute knew was that the girl, Candy, who had ' high connections," had been given a room in the girls' hostel After some days Murthy was told to pack off to Delhi and in his place came Jagat Murari It later transpired that Murthy had opposed the girl's entry into the Institute but he had been told by Sippy that it was a "direct order from V C Shukla "

Asked if he had sponsored Candy and got her admitted into the Institute without any preliminary tests, Shukla said "I have never sponsored anybody G P Sippy may have sponsored her ' Talking about Candy, he said "She knows how to dance very well I remember I went to deliver the convocation [address] at Poona where she gave a dance performance As much as I understand of dancing it appeared good to me In fact, Bombay television even filmed it ' Presumably without any directives from him'

"He was a great promoter of people,' says an officer of the Film Directorate, "specially if they happened to have charm and were willing to share some of it " One New Delhi journal[6] told the story of a beautiful garment designer from Bombay who held an exhibition at the Ashoka Hotel "V C Shukla used all his official position to pressurize some newspapers to get the story [of 'Designer Neelam'] published " The story appeared with *blow ups of the designer in some of the Delhi papers Some* months later, the lady was appointed member of the Film Censor Board

[5] *Blitz* 11 June 1977
[6] *The Voice of Millions*, April 1977



B K Karanjia, Editor of the *Filmfare*, had to resign from the chairmanship of the Film Finance Corporation because "I did not go to the airport to receive Shri V C Shukla each time he visited Bombay" The newspapers were instructed not to publish the news about Karanjia's resignation When a Congress MP, Shrikant Verma, raised the issue of the autonomy of the Film Finance Corporation during the question hour in Rajya Sabha, the All India Radio and the Samachar were told to suppress the speech

"The way V C Shukla indulged in the affairs of the film industry," wrote Shrikant Verma to the Congress President, "will remain an affair to remember He tried to reduce our artists to court jesters and our stars to court dancers Those who did not dance to his tune were humiliated to the extent that the entire film industry rose against him and campaigned against the Congress Party during the elections "

Shukla was allegedly smitten by a film actress called Vidya Sinha She was a member of the Indian team led by Shukla to the Canadian film festival According to one film journal,[7] the Minister knocked at the door of her hotel room and said, "My name is Vidya, your name is Vidya. " Another journal[8] said "Unconfirmed reports which demand a probe allege that Vidya was in tears because of the knock knock on her door at nights! Once she had to take shelter with the Chopras [film producer B R Chopra and wife], and Shukla kept telling Vidya 'We have a common name!' " Back in India, the actress is reported to have said "Never again will I attend a film festival in the company of this man"

Not all actresses thought that way, though Shabana Azmi, who accompanied Shukla to the Tashkent Film Festival, is quoted as having said of him "Oh, he's so handsome He is a killer" (A pre poll statement) The Minister is said to have declared that her film, *Fakira*, would not be cleared by the censor and yet soon after their return from Tashkent, the film was passed with just minor cuts

The Editor of a film journal, who happened to be at the Tashkent Film Festival, says he was told by his friend, film actress Katy Mirza "He [Shukla] complimented me on my figure and

[7] *Film Mirror*, May 1977
[8] *Cine Blitz*, April 1977

took down my room number During the night he rang up after every ten minutes, saying please come to my room, Katy Of course, I did not go"

There are numerous stories of this kind, but enough is enough. How long can you go on with stuff like this? Wouldn't you rather believe Shukla when he says it was his lifestyle which created this "false image" of him? He claims he has a "happy married life" and no outsider can question that Nor that he has three charming daughters

While projecting the image of his masters, Shukla never forgot to boost his own image All through the elections, the news bulletins from the Bhopal station of the All India Radio rarely went without a long speech of Vidya Charan Shukla in one remote village or another But when a senior member of the Central Information Service gave 60 words to P C Sethi in a news bulletin, he was promptly taken to task Sethi had gone to his home town, Ujjain, where he was given a reception in November 1976 In its regional bulletin, the Bhopal AIR used a part of the story sent by the Samachar Shukla immediately asked his Joint Secretary to initiate action against the officer responsible for broadcasting the news item The very next day, the Station Director of the Bhopal AIR got telephonic instructions from the Joint Secretary to "relieve" the officer at once The officer was told that he was being transferred to Dibrugarh, Assam A few days later he was informed that he had to go to Dungarpur, a remote district in Rajasthan

One of the last victims of the Propaganda Minister was an old AIR correspondent at Raipur He was telegraphically dismissed for having committed the offence of filing a 75-word report on the speech of Mrs Vijayalakshmi Pandit at Raipur during the election compaign Shukla called the Station Director of Bhopal AIR and reprimanded him He then telephoned his officials in New Delhi and asked them to have the man's dismissal order sent telegraphically

Shukla's main instruments for coercing and bamboozling the press and the film world were K N Prasad and another police officer, A K Verma, whom he brought as Director of the Film Festival Directorate Verma, who belonged to the Madhya Pradesh cadre, had been a class fellow of Shukla and was a friend of the family Another officer whose services Shukla requisitioned was

L Dayal, who had been a Joint Secretary with him in the Ministry of Defence Production There was a good reason why Shukla was keen to bring Dayal with him to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry Dayal, an IAS officer, belonged to Bihar and was also close to Jagjivan Ram, the then Agriculture Minister When Shukla was leaving the Defence Production Ministry, Jagjivan Ram asked him if he could take Dayal to the Agriculture Ministry Shukla scented danger in that What if Dayal spilt all the beans about his secret transactions in the Defence Production Ministry? He had to keep Dayal with him "No, Babuji, I have a job for Dayal," Shukla told Jagjivan Ram "Please let him go with me to the I & B Ministry," he requested.

And so Dayal came to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry as a Joint Secretary Later, when Dr A B Baji was shunted from the post of Principal Information Officer (PIO), Dayal was made Additional Secretary and PIO While the two cops were excellent at using third degree methods on editors, correspondents, and film people, Dayal, a former teacher of English in Patna University, was good at drafting notes and preparing files Short and roly-poly, Dayal was an amiable man and many thought he had been unnecessarily "trapped" in a mafia group But together the three of them made quite a bunch of officials, all putting their bit in serving the "interests" of their master, and all enjoying it, no doubt

They had their share of the film world spree, with more trips abroad during the 19 months than they could have hoped for in as many years All of them enjoyed dabbling in the film media and if one of them was away the other two would share the work They had a wonderful "package deal," according to sources in the Ministry who ought to know

In between, direct instructions would sometimes emerge from the Information and Broadcasting Secretary, S M H Burnely, which would take officers by surprise because he was not one of the "gang" It was then discovered that Burnely had a direct line with Sanjay Gandhi through Mohammad Yunus, the Prime Minister's very Special Envoy

Shukla was later to blame Burney for the now-famous "banishment" of Kishore Kumar from the All India Radio and the TV "It is incorrect," Shukla told the Editor of a New Delhi magazine, "that the songs of Kishore Kumar were banned over the AIR for his non participation in the *Geeton Bhari Sham* (A Musical

Evening) programme The fact is that Mr Burney, I & B Secretary, was in Bombay He wanted to talk with Kishore Kumar on phone But Kishore did not give a proper reply to Mr Burney And Mr Burney was piqued It was he who ordered a ban on his songs over the radio, which I lifted later on when I came to know about it " Quite an explanation!

Shukla and his blood hounds were also working on secret plans for the Ministry K N Prasad, with his espionage training, was not only building up dossiers on journalists and his own officers but was busy creating a full-scale network to spy on high ups in the government, including Cabinet Ministers For the first time in the history of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, sophisticated electronic gadgets for bugging were imported Prasad functioned in close concert with the Chief of RAW, R N Kau, Slowly but steadily, Prasad was moving towards converting the entire Central Information Service into a gigantic intelligence organization He had elaborate plans Mockingly he had told an officer "What is the Central Information Service when we have nothing to inform to the people? It should better be renamed Central Intelligence Service But then we need to screen the personnel thoroughly There are dark horses in the cadre whose sympathies are with the Opposition "

Prasad, with the full backing of Shukla, wanted to place most of the media under police officers, and had even written to the Home Ministry asking for 14 Indian Police Service officers for the Ministry In one of his confidential notes, Prasad commented ' Central Information Service people come into maximum contact with the press and other agencies who deal in public relations It is a good cover They [CIS people] should be trained to collect and disseminate information only for intelligence purposes " Confidential letters had gone out to out station personnel of the Information Service in All India Radio to keep feeding the Ministry with materials "classified as non-broadcastable items " Already on the cards was the plan to set up an institute of public information, a cover for training the personnel in intelligence methods 1984 was after all not very far away!

As the Emergency advanced and Sanjay Gandhi's tentacles grew stronger, the pressure on the recalcitrant newspapers mounted Working constantly on the prince was the smooth Marwari

operator, K K Birla, who had pumped in huge amounts into the Maruti Ltd as an "investment" for bigger gains elsewhere, and placed his own newspaper, the *Hindustan Times*, at the master's feet He was only too keen to swallow the *Indian Express* group of newspapers Ambitions of controlling a powerful newspaper had also arisen in the bumptious young Punjabi friend of Sanjay Gandhi, Kamal Nath This Calcutta-based businessman had suddenly become a power to be reckoned with for the simple reason that he had once shared a room with the prince at the Doon School and was his chum He had set his sights high, he was out to control the *Statesman*

Both the *Indian Express* and the *Statesman* had been considered "enemy papers" by No 1 Safdarjang Road They had to be tamed and, if possible, taken over Working under the command of Sanjay Gandhi and of his agents, Kamal Nath and K K Birla, Shukla started tightening the screws on the two newspapers

One of the early confrontations between Shukla and C R Irani, the young Managing Director of the Statesman Ltd, came on the question of Editor's appointment Towards the end of August 1975, the newspaper's Board of Directors decided to allow N J Nanporia's contract to expire by afflux of time on 30 September 1975 In mid-September, Irani ran into Shukla in the lobby of Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay

"When is your Chief Editor's term expiring?" Shukla asked

"We don't have a Chief Editor," said Irani, "but if you mean Mr Nanporia his term expires on 30 September"

Shukla insisted that the decision should not be acted upon until he had had a chance to discuss the matter with him Irani told him that the Board's decision would have to be implemented and that the people concerned, including Nanporia, had already been told about it Shukla, however, insisted that Irani should go and see him in Delhi

Irani had his second meeting with Shukla at Shastri Bhawan on 25 September Shukla started off by saying that the decision to impose total censorship of page proofs on the Delhi edition of the *Statesman* had been taken "to teach the Delhi edition a lesson because Nihal Singh [the then Resident Editor] had not behaved properly" He added jauntily that it was certainly within the powers of the government to take even more stringent measures if they did not allow Nanporia to continue Under the

Emergency they had enough powers to do this, he said

Shukla went on to explain the government's "point of view" He said the *Statesman* was forcing Nanporia to go because of his "total support to the government since the Emergency" On the other hand, Nihal Singh had been very difficult and for him to become the Editor of the Calcutta edition was "unacceptable" to the government

Shukla quoted an intelligence report on Nihal Singh, but it was obviously incorrect, as Irani pointed out to him After they had talked for an hour or so, Shukla seemed to realize that he could do little about the paper's decision and began seeking "co-operation" under the new editorial arrangements

And now it was the turn of the West Bengal Chief Minister, S S Ray, to pressurize the newspaper Having failed to coerce Irani himself, Shukla had approached Ray, who had himself often sought Shukla's help in the matter of arresting Calcutta journalists who had been writing against him Among them were Gaur Kishore Ghosh and Barun Sengupta, both eminent journalists of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the paper which struggled against his buffooneries all through the 19 months Ray sent a message to Irani telling him that Nanporia must be retained "I don't want you to jump from the frying pan into the fire," conveyed the Chief Minister

In the meantime, the Inspector General of Police, Ranjit Gupta, "officially" demanded the names and addresses of all the shareholders of the newspaper, which were readily supplied to him because there was no secret about shareholders of companies It later transpired that a shareholder holding less than 8 per cent of the shares had been approached by the son of the Tamil Nadu Governor, K.K Shah, to give open proxies for the newspaper's shares in favour of Rajni Patel who was then close to Indira Gandhi This request was turned down, but some of the shareholders indicated that they may not be able to withstand government pressures for too long

Two days before Nanporia was to quit, Irani got frantic calls from Shukla's Private Secretary asking him to rush to New Delhi A day later, Irani met Shukla and was told that although he (Shukla) and the Prime Minister had "no problem' it was now S S Ray who had objected to the change of Editor Shukla said Ray had met the Prime Minister in this regard, and she in turn

had asked him to "do whatever Ray required"

Shukla then informed Irani that he had spoken about the editorial change to the Chairman of the *Statesman*, S K Das, in Kalimpong, and that Das had told him that he "knew nothing about it" and was in fact going to Calcutta to deal with the problem himself Irani was taken aback He told Shukla he could not believe this because Das was well aware of all that had happened and was a party to the Board's decision "But I myself spoke to Mr Das," Shukla said, "and this is what he told me"

Irani did not believe it and said in that case his only surmise was that the telephone lines between Delhi and Kalimpong were capable of creating distortions of their own! He suggested that Shukla should telephone Das in his presence, so that he (Irani) could listen to the conversation on the extension He also asked for another call to be booked to Chief Minister Ray

Shukla picked up the phone and asked the operator to book priority calls to Kalimpong and Calcutta Normally the calls ought to have come through in a matter of minutes and when they did not come through for over an hour Irani began to get suspicious Soon after "booking" the calls, Shukla had excused himself and gone out for some minutes

He came back and told Irani, "You please stay on here and receive the calls I have to go for an urgent party meeting"

After he left, Irani went to the telephone operator's room and asked why the calls had not come through The operator, a little startled, told him that the Minister had ordered him to wait for instructions before putting the calls through!

Bluff and bluster were in built in Shukla's character.

4

D K Barooah The Sly Jester

"What is that clown doing here? ' Sanjay Gandhi was heard asking contemptuously when he saw Dev Kant Barooah climbing up the dais for Indira Gandhi's Boat Club rally on 18 June 1975 Jayaprakash Narayan had called the Congress President a ' court jester" and the title stuck This was perhaps the only thing common between JP and Sanjay Gandhi their contempt for Barooah[1]

The contempt was mutual Only 19 months later, Barooah was to describe Sanjay Gandhi as a "Borstal character"[1] and privately he may have done it all the time that he was playing the great bard and crony to the mother and son

Barooah was no clown That was only a mask he wore Under it was a sly and scheming politician who had escalated to power through sycophancy and manipulation He was a man who always tried to create an image that was totally different from his real self There was very little about him that was not phoney He had stacks of books, he quoted glibly, and often wrongly, from Eliot and Rossetti and Swinburne, recounted anecdotes by the dozens per hour, and never, never could you tie him down to anything for more than a few minutes From poetry to religion to politics to caste to sex, he would flit across a wide sweeping canvas and some people would come away with the impression that here was a learned man He was good at simula-

[1]Dev Kant Barooah in an interview with the author

tion His cherubic face and pouting lips often reminded you of Peter Ustinov in the role of Nero Barooah, too, fiddled while his house burnt!

He had become the Congress President through his tireless flattery of Indira Gandhi and the strong lobbying of former communists and fellow travellers in the Congress and of the "CPI caucus" Barooah had for long flirted with communists and leftists which had given him a veneer of leftism He was of course far from anything of the sort He described himself as a "Nehru Socialist," but if there was any "ism" he genuinely believed in, it was epicureanism, a common denominator of Indira's men

But why had she chosen this man to head the Congress Party at this crucial juncture? What was his image or stature? There have been many fawning commentators over the years who have showered great encomiums on Barooah, describing him as 'erudite and polished" Along with the new class of politicians and rulers, there had emerged in the country a new tribe of journalists who thrived on sycophancy and drum beating—a parallel development, part of the same wheeling dealing milieu Barooah, now 63 years old, had himself been a journalist of sorts in Assam and was considered a trend-setter in Assamese poetry In 1930 and the early forties, he went to jail From 1938 to 1945 he was Secretary of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and in 1949 he became a member of the Constituent Assembly M O Mathai, Special Assistant to Jawaharlal Nehru, remembers Barooah as a 'frivolous man" who was all the time trying hard to ingratiate himself with Nehru

Towards that end, perhaps, he had become a friend of Nehru's son in law, Feroze Gandhi, or it could have been because of their 'common interests," one of which was women One of the jobs that Nehru assigned to Barooah was to conduct the mid term election in what was then PEPSU (a union of Patiala and some other former princely states of Punjab) Even at that time Barooah used to brag about his deep knowledge of the role of caste in politics, and say that he had a caste map of every constituency in PEPSU He may well have had this, his vision of politics never went beyond the realms of caste and community When he returned from the assignment Nehru, who was careful about money matters, reprimanded Barooah for not having submitted the accounts of the election That was the end of Barooah for some time, but he

sneaked back to one position or another He was a member of the first Lok Sabha (1952-57) but was denied a ticket for the next parliamentary elections For the next 14 years he hibernated in his home state

No matter how hard he tried he was never accepted as a leader in Assam He had no background of public work, and Chaliha was too strong a Chief Minister to tolerate his snobbery and showmanship When Chaliha made him Education Minister, one of the first public statements Barooah made was "I sacked 385 teachers and not a dog barked " He had perhaps done a good job in dismissing teachers who had got their appointments on the basis of fake certificates, but the way he went about bragging showed the man in very poor light Chaliha threw him out of his cabinet Later, Barooah was to challenge the leadership of Chaliha and was badly trounced It was from this point that Barooah's great hatred for the upper castes began He became a great champion of the backward classes, not because he had any great love for them, but simply because the upper castes had rejected him in a big way during the leadership contest He burned with hatred for Brahmins whom he started describing as "Baputis" (cooks) whose *sacred threads were "good only for making shoe laces"*

In order to wreak vengeance on the upper castes, he encouraged casteism in the state and became one of the most ardent supporters of the so-called "Other Backward Classes " The Emergency gave him a chance to screw some of his enemies in the state One of his *main targets was the Assam Tribune group of papers*, whose proprietors happened to be Brahmins Barooah summoned his protege, V C Shukla, and directed him to cancel all government advertisements to the group of papers Shukla promptly complied

When the Delhi correspondent of the *Assam Tribune*, Naresh Rajkhowa, met *Shukla, he said "I have nothing to do with your* papers I don't even read them You should settle it with Barooahji "

The correspondent went to Barooah "I don't read your newspaper," the Congress President burst out "Your Editor does not even know how to write a correct sentence First change your Editor "

When the newspaper owners agreed to change the Editor, Barooah summoned Shukla to his house Rajkhowa and the newspaper's proprietor were with Barooah when the Information

and Broadcasting Minister arrived When Barooah told Shukla that the *Assam Tribune* had "agreed to behave" the Minister reminded him about the Assamese daily belonging to the same group "Sir, didn't you say we had to take action against the *Dainik Assam* also? '

"Oh yes," Barooah told the newspaper proprietor angrily, "you will have to remove the Editor of the *Dainik Assam* also "

Rajkhowa tried to reason with the Congress President An editor was after all not a domestic servant and it would not look good to throw him out suddenly The paper's credibility would suffer

"I don't know all that," Barooah flared up "You have to throw the man out "

Could he suggest some man for editorship? Barooah at once named a person whose only qualification seemed to be that he belonged to the "Other Backward Classes "

"But he is a very sickly man," said Rajkhowa, finding at least one good excuse "He cannot even come to the office three days a week "

Barooah suggested another name This time the man concerned belonged to an upper caste, but was married to an O B C The newspaper men decided to play for time and came away without making any firm commitment

The entire politics of Barooah was based on manipulations of castes At one point during the Lok Sabha election campaign in 1977, he told his partymen in the state "When you have the Alis [Muslims] and the coolies [tea garden workers] why should you be afraid of the others? ' He had become one of the most hated men in Assam

In February 1971, Barooah was thrust on the unfortunate state of Bihar as Governor By then Indira Gandhi had become the "Supreme Leader," hiring and firing Governors and Chief Ministers at her sweet will The Governors, supposedly above politics, were being used unabashedly to strengthen and promote the Congress Party in the states And the party had, by then, already become synonymous with Indira Gandhi—not the country, yet

Governor Chakravarty of Haryana had already shown the way Barooah put his heart and soul into scheming for the ouster of

the then United Front government headed by socialist leader, Karpoori Thakur Indira Gandhi's "dirty job man," Yashpal Kapoor, arrived in Patna with a bulging briefcase, parked himself in an airconditioned hotel, and started dialling his "contactmen " The "Operation Toppling" was on Barooah lost no time in writing out a report recommending President's rule

With the United Front government out of the way, the Governor proceeded to work assiduously to promote the prospects of the Congress Party In the months preceding the mid term elections of 1972, the Governor toured the state extensively Though the tours were ostensibly for administrative purposes, the insiders knew quite well what Barooah was really doing Years later, in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's fall, he boasted to his friends how as the Governor of Bihar he had "swung the balance" in favour of the Congress, how hard he had worked in the tribal belts of Chotanagpur to wean the people away from the regional Jharkhand parties

During the two years that he remained the Governor of Bihar, Barooah proved himself to be a man who was always ready to bend double to please his masters in Delhi It was not only Indira Gandhi's commands that he followed, he even took orders from Lalit Narayan Mishra or Yashpal Kapoor Forever willing to court the courtiers

He proved his great loyalty to the courtiers of Indira Gandhi the day Kedar Pandey was being sworn in as Chief Minister Among those invited to take oath as ministers was Harinath Mishra, one of the very few men of integrity in Congress today Just when the swearing in was to start, Barooah received a phone call from Delhi At the other end was his great pal, Yashpal Kapoor "There is a little error in the list of ministers we prepared," Kapoor told him It was not really an error, it was an afterthought A little back-stage drama, nothing unusual, had taken place after Kedar Pandey had left Delhi with the list of ministers he was to have The list had been prepared almost entirely by Lalit Narayan Mishra and Yashpal Kapoor Those were days when the two were still hand in glove with each other Mishra was at the peak of his fund-collecting career Sanjay Gandhi and Kapoor were in his pocket, it was nearly a year later that the two started considering Mishra expendable

Kapoor knew that Lalit Narayan Mishra wanted his younger

brother, Dr Jagannath Mishra, to be taken into the Bihar ministry He knew, too, Mishra's great allergy towards Harinath Mishra (no relatives) It was a mutual allergy, which sprang from their totally different attitudes to life and politics Like oil and water, they could never mix Early morning on the same day that the swearing in was to take place, Mishra was going abroad Kapoor met him at Palam airport and suggested Why not put Jagannath Mishra's name in place of the other Mishra? "Do as you like," L N Mishra is said to have told him before going in for security check

And so the phone call at the last minute There was hush-hush all around as the governor's secretary went and whispered something in the ears of Harinath Mishra Instead of him, Dr Jagannath Mishra, who had only a few years earlier been elected to the Bihar Legislative Council with Jan Sangh support, was sworn in as Minister Barooah had demonstrated that for him a command from Yashpal Kapoor or even from a constable of No 1 Safdarjang Road was the last word

Like all courtiers, Barooah had his own court Among his favourite courtiers were civil servants, doctors, and engineers famous for debauchery and dissipation The "social nights" presided over by the cigar smoking *Rajyapal*, a great teller of bawdy tales, became the subject of gossip at Bankipur Club During his time Raj Bhawan turned into a great centre for dance and music "A great patron of arts," his sycophants called him One day the Governor and his entourage sailed across the Ganga, like the Governors of the Raj, to camp at the Sonepur Mela, reputedly the biggest cattle fair in Asia His interest did not lie in horses or elephants His eyes were peeled for the *nautch* girls of Benares All day and night the Governor's camp, set in a sylvan orchard away from prying eyes, was a "pleasure dome" redolent with *attar* and *gulab* and *husnhaina* A greater Nabob had not been seen around for decades!

[illegible] cut on to Tokyo for a few days and from there Barooah quietly slipped out to Kyoto which, he had been told, was famous for its sweet and obliging "hostesses" But the good point about him,

to the chagrin of the communists No, with Dixit as the Congress President their plans to launch an all out battle against the "rightists and reactionaries" with the help and resources of the Congress Party and the government would not work The CPI lobbyists, Rajni Patel, Lalit Narayan Mishra, and Siddhartha Shankar Ray, started promoting Barooah for Congress presidentship At that point, Indira Gandhi could ill afford to do without the help of the pro-Moscow communists Apart from the CPI's support to the Congress in Kerala, West Bengal, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh, it was the communist leader Bhupesh Gupta who had pulled the government's chestnuts out of the fire in the stormy debate in Parliament on the Central Bureau of Investigation's report on the license scandal Her increasing dependence on the communists was creating its own tensions in the Congress Party, but she thought she had first to deal with the "rightist menace "

On 19 October 1974, Barooah was made the Congress President In the words of his courtiers and cronies, he had come to "restore lusture to the Congress", but in fact he had come to preside over its liquidation.

Within days of taking over, Barooah sent out a joint Congress-CPI resolution with a Churchillian appeal to "fight fascism in every city, village, farm, and alley " At a two day session of "Anti-Fascist Parliamentarians' Convention" in New Delhi, Barooah and Rajeswara Rao, General Secretary of the CPI, formally declared war Like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, the two set out to fight the "fascist windmills "

"Fight the dragon of fascism," Barooah went about shouting from city to city, dais to dais There was a virtual eruption of "Anti-Fascist Conventions" all over the country—just another name for communist propaganda camps financed by the Congress Party

In consultation with his communist friends, Barooah drew up what he described as his "two-point strategy" to eradicate dissidence in the state units and initiate a countrywide training programme for the Congress rank and file

Instead of dissidence being eradicated, the CPI's grand strategy of capturing power in the states with the so called "progressive" elements in the Congress further sharpened the factional fight in the party. Barooah had identified himself almost completely with the pro-CPI elements Right from the beginning he func-

tioned through his own hand picked men on an ad hoc basis The Barooah-Rajni Siddhartha caucus was in full power at court, it cared little for the fast disintegrating party

This caucus was as responsible, or perhaps even more, for the clamping of the Emergency than the Sanjay-Bansi Lal gang-up In fact, according to a senior political commentator,* the proposal that internal Emergency should be imposed to counter the JP movement was mooted as early as 8 January 1975 in a note to Indira Gandhi by Siddhartha Shankar Ray

Ray and his chums turned against the Sanjay caucus not because it was crude or ruthless or corrupt but because it had thrown them into the doghouse There was not much to choose between the one caucus and the other, in fact, the Barooah-Rajni-Ray caucus would in some ways have been even more dangerous than the Sanjay caucus, more sinister in the long run Being mindless, the Sanjay caucus could perhaps do more physical harm, but because of that it also brought a backlash much sooner

While Sanjay Gandhi cut Siddhartha Shankar Ray and Rajni Patel down to size almost immediately after the declaration of the Emergency, Barooah's skin was a little too thick to be affected by little humiliations Being called a clown, even in his hearing, was not going to put him off He could take much more, and bide his time He wanted to project himself as a loyal, harmless figure who would sail along with Indira Gandhi and her cohorts That was the way he chose for survival He knew too well her great weakness for flattery, he knew that nothing could please her better than his saying that "Indira is India" in spite of its Nazi stink

He bent double to eulogize the mother and son, but kept his own pipelines to their "enemies" open Not one statement that he made about Sanjay Gandhi was without an element of sarcasm Was he praising or damning the boy when he made his famous *statements*? To cite one of them, he said "Youth should not only be soldiers but Generals too Youth should take over the party and the country Nehru had become a national hero when he was 30, Sankaracharya was 19 when he sought to transform Hindu society, Vivekanand was 27 when he stormed the Western

*Ranajit Roy, *Business Standard*, 28 May 1977

citadel, Akbar was in his teen when he propounded a new religion " A man with a little more IQ than Sanjay Gandhi ought to have felt more damned than praised by such a brazen comparison

Barooah knew, better than anyone else, Sanjay Gandhi's plans to capture the Congress Party through the Youth Congress He knew too that whatever Sanjay did had the full backing and support of Indira Gandhi Barooah was not the one to invite a confrontation as long as she was in power if perchance they fell he could laugh at them thereafter!

"Look what she has come to," he said contemptuously the day Brahmanand Reddy was elected Congress President Barooah's own candidate for presidentship, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, had been defeated, but he had another cause to be happy "From the country's leader she became a party leader and now she has become no more than a faction leader," he told his friends with great relish at one of his evening "durbars " His turn about had caused him not the least compunction

Nor did a turn about cause any compunction to the 35 year old receptionist-turned politician, Ambika Soni The woman who until mid-March hardly spoke without extolling her great and beloved leader, Sanjay Gandhi was suddenly pouring venom against him after his fall Without batting an eyelid, she declared "I was not a Sanjay-nominee to the presidentship of the Youth Congress, and I have nothing to do with his dealings " More than anything else that single statement epitomized her character Unless her spiritual guru, Sai Baba, had put her in the post by some magic, there was no way she could suddenly have popped up during the Emergency as the Youth Congress President without being a Sanjay nominee She was entirely the creation of Sanjay Gandhi, his creature if ever there was one

Convent educated Ambika Soni is the daughter of Nakul Sen, a former Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab and Lieutenant Governor of Goa Her marriage to an off er of the Indian Foreign Service took her to Cuba where she came in contact, with Fidel Castro, studied Spanish at Havana University, and picked up some stray lessons from the Cuban student movement Her marriage, by all accounts, was not a great success, in any case, she was too ambitious a person to be held by the narrow confines

of a home She returned to India in 1968 and worked for about a year as a receptionist in the Air France office in New Delhi, where you still hear whispered stories about her "activities"

Came the Congress split of 1969, and Ambika Soni was "so inspired by the personality and leadership of Indira Gandhi" that she enlisted as a volunteer of the All India Congress Committee She went to meet H N Bahuguna, then a General Secretary of the party, to ask for "some work" and he referred her to Mukul Bannerjee of the Foreign Affairs and Women's Front of the AICC, which was how she started working there

It was there that she came into contact with Chandrajeet Yadav, then a Congress General Secretary, who is said to have an eye for charming women That was the beginning of a long and close friendship, political and otherwise It helped her get some stray positions in the AICC

Until as late as in May 1975, when she went to campaign in the Gujarat elections, nobody seemed to know her except as "some woman close to Chandrajeet" One saw her at the central election office at Ahmedabad, surrounded by a group of young hoodlums from Delhi, apparently there to campaign for the party

The next one heard of Ambika Soni, she was on the Sanjay bandwagon, rolling headily to power From Castro to Chandrajeet Yadav to Sanjay Gandhi, it was quite a journey In between, somewhere, she had turned into a great devotee of Sai Baba

"It happened like an accident," she said "My mother knew Sai Baba before I had read about him in Cuba, but it was for me more a sense of wonder than belief Then one day I went to a *kirtan* I can't describe the emotional experience I had "[3] Her eyes suddenly closed in beatific bliss, as it were, just thinking of that experience

She then went to Sai Baba's Ashram at Puttaparthi "I was determined to fight it I didn't want to believe But the very first time I saw him walking up to me my determination crumbled The last day I was there, he came up to me and said 'Yes Ambika, *tum kya chahta hai?*' (what do you want?) I told him I wanted to live in his Ashram for a while Then I went to Whitefield for a fortnight It was the most memorable experience I have ever had I can't explain it Some one who can generate

[3]In an interview with the author

even one minute's love is worthy of devotion "

She had been hankering for a "minute's love " Somewhere deep inside her there had been a corroding frustration, a void She needed a crutch

"I see no conflict between Sai Baba and political work," she said Nor did she see any contradiction in being sandwiched between a communist-baiter like Sanjay Gandhi and a thinly veiled communist like Chandrajeet Yadav When Sanjay made her the President of the Youth Congress, many people asked him, ' Why did you do it? She is a communist "

"I am not a communist, I am a Nehru Socialist," she proclaimed, as Barooah had done "Nehru Socialism" was not the only common point between the senior and the junior presidents Both were great sycophants of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi while they were in power, both claimed that they had complained against the excesses of the Emergency Neither Barooah nor Ambika Soni was homebound, both looked for fulfilment else where If Barooah flirted with communists, so did Ambika Soni

Most of her friends, she said, belonged to the "high society ' and when she became a Congress volunteer all of them had told her "Why did you have to get into this bloody muck? But in Sanjay she found a shortcut to the top Before you could say Jack Robinson, she was a power to be reckoned with Chief Ministers started hanging around her, they thought she was the best via media to the prince who had suddenly emerged as the most powerful, the most feared man in the country

When she had gained the complete confidence of Sanjay Gandhi, Ambika Soni tried hard to bring her friend, Chandrajeet Yadav, close to the prince ' Oh no, not that communist,' Sanjay had remarked when she brought up his name She tried to explain that Yadav had snapped all his ties with the communists long back, that there was nothing of a commie in him any more, but Sanjay retorted ' Once a communist, always a communist "

Even so, Ambika Soni had continued her efforts and gradually Chandrajeet Yadav wormed his way into the prince's court He was always careful about not letting people know about his line with Sanjay, which made some people describe him as a "camouflage Sanjay man " He worked hard to make the Gauhati Youth Congress session a big affair He went round the embassies of the socialist countries persuading them to send their delegations to

the session A plane was chartered to carry the delegates to Gauhati and Chandrajeet Yadav went with Sanjay and Ambika Soni in this flight At the session, he and V C Shukla were the two Central Ministers who gave long speeches, both exercises in unmitigated sycophancy

Ambika Soni herself, who was later to denounce Sanjay as an extra-constitutional centre of power, described him at Gauhati as "the man who symbolizes and reflects the yearnings and aspirations of the youth of the country"

Anyone who saw her at No 10 Janpath, the headquarters of the Indian Youth Congress, during the days of Sanjay's glory could not help notice the ego ride she was on She would crow about her "five million members, all genuine, all accounted for," about the "revolution" in the Youth Congress under the "inspiring leadership of Sanjayji," about the 200 Lok Sabha seats that the youths were "sure to get through Sanjayji" She told you all this with such great elan that you could not doubt for a moment that she believed what she was saying

Even with all the myths exploded, a glint of excitement shows in her eyes as she describes how she felt in those days of glory That day at Gauhati, for instance, when Indira Gandhi had told them "you have stolen our thunder," Ambika Soni had felt "on top of the world" The portals of power had opened, the sky was the limit for her She had begun imagining herself as the "future Indira Gandhi of India" Another megalomaniac in the making!

She went to Amethi to campaign for her leader, and she had gone from door to door, from village to village Looking back, she thinks the people in the constituency were "scared," they had wanted to pass her on to the next house!

She had felt the end coming One day during the election campaign, her nine-year-old son, Anup, had come back from school and announced "Mummy, everybody is voting for Janata in my class"

"Children don't have votes," she told him

"Oh mummy, not them Their parents are voting Janata I told them I am voting Congress"

Ambika Soni says the day Sanjay Gandhi announced that he was quitting politics, she went and told him "I am now on my own"

Thanks to Sanjay Gandhi, she was at least a member of the Rajya Sabha, and now that she had cut herself adrift from him,

she would be free to join her commie friend in the kettle and the pot battle

But she claims to have learnt something from it all With all the great dreams left behind, she now reflects ' If you want to be in public life, your private life must be clean and above board Otherwise it is bound to catch up with you some day ."

5

Yashpal and Dhawan The Factotums

A room in Capoor's Hotel in Hazratganj, Lucknow's fashionable shopping centre The air thick with smoke and alcoholic fumes, the ash trays overflowing with smoking cigarette butts A chubby, round faced man, age fortyish, reads out one by one names from a printed list At each name he stops, looks at his two young companions for their comment and if they say no, he moves on to the next name, never without a four letter word and a puff at his cigarette He is a man with a ready laughter, full of bonhomie and camaraderie "Let's go on," he says after a quick sip "We ll tick the doubtful ones too One never can tell these bastards!"

The list over, the man reaches out for the phone and rattles half a dozen names and telephone numbers, all of legislators of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly "Keep trying these numbers," he tells the operator in very endearing Punjabi, "and give me whichever you get fast" The deference and alacrity that the hotel desk, the telephone operators, and the bearers show in dealing with this room indicate he is no ordinary guest

The telephone rings He has got one of the persons he wanted "Please come right over to the Capoor Hotel It's urgent" The two guests leave in a hurry, after quick ones for the road "We have to rush and file our Assembly reports," they say Both journalists from local newspapers

Soon the expected man arrives and is met with great alacrity The room has been cleared, the tables swept This guest unfortu-

nately is not a drinking type Soft drinks are ordered

Our friend doesn't take long to come to the point "You know very well, brother, what a mess this government has created At this rate the state will soon go to the dogs The Chief Minister tries to show he is a great champion of the poor Champion, my foot! I hope you agree we will have to change this government The sooner the better What say you?"

The young MLA is non committal He just talks in monosyllables The chubby man lights another cigarette, looking keenly at the visitor through half shut eyes Will he, won't he? he wonders He decides he will go ahead and try

He pulls a briefcase from the bed "You will have to convince your friends," he says, opening it 'Political brainwashing is not an easy job Involves a lot of work " He has brought out several wads of currency notes "Take these," he says, pushing them into the visitor's hands, "you'll need them for expenses "

There are some moments of tense silence The young legislator gets up and throws the money on the bed "What cheek! he bursts out "Even typists are out to run the country now ' In rage he stalks out of the room, banging the door behind him

Two days later the man hurries out of the hotel, a cigarette hanging from his thick lips, his Gandhi cap at a jaunty angle He takes a taxi straight to the Amausi airport In the three days he had been in Lucknow this was the first time he had stirred out of his room In the three days, sitting in his room, he had allegedly spent about three lakhs of rupees, all in hard cash By the time he left, Charan Singh's United Front Ministry had fallen [1]

The year was 1969 The man behind the toppling Yashpal Kapoor—the chief factotum of Indira Gandhi This was his first ministry toppling venture, many more were to follow

"Where is my Alsatian?" Indira Gandhi used to ask about him sometimes He himself liked to say he was her "Hanuman Whether Alsatian or Hanuman, Yashpal Kapoor remained one of her most trusted men for years

His special charge was Rae Bareli, *the constituency of Indira* Gandhi Everything about Rae Bareli, from the setting up of an

[1]Reconstructed from interviews with journalists and former legislators of UP

industry to the transfer of an officer, was routed through him He was an efficient organizer, a good speaker, a grass-root man who knew how to deal with different sections of the people At all times he zealously watched the interests of his master The moment he heard of the slightest grievance anywhere in the area he would immediately rush to the place to ensure that the grievance was redressed and the people satisfied The chief spokesman of Indira Gandhi for the constituency, he became something of a Nawab of Rae Bareli

Almost every year Yashpal Kapoor would organize a development conference at Rae Bareli, a huge affair, with important Union Ministers, the Chief Minister and his cabinet colleagues, all the technical and civil heads of developmental departments from Delhi and Lucknow thronging Rae Bareli Indira Gandhi herself presided over them, but Yashpal Kapoor would always play the majordomo

Once, during the time that Kamalapati Tripathi was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the Rae Bareli conference witnessed a sparring match between Yashpal and Tripathi, both speaking in innuendoes about each other There was always a war of attrition between Yashpal and Tripathi, in fact between him and anybody who happened to be the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yashpal considered himself a super Chief Minister, at least as far as Rae Bareli was concerned It was a state within state with Yashpal as the boss He had worked hard in the area, indeed so hard that many people of Rae Bareli said he was better known in the villages of the district than Indira Gandhi While she was for most people just a name or a fleeting visage, Yashpal was very much a living presence in the area, somebody who was grappling all the time with their problems If the constituents went to Delhi, it was Yashpal Kapoor who looked after them, heard their problems and, if possible, arranged a "darshan" of the deity, Indira Gandhi He was the chief *panda* of the Prime Minister

At Lucknow one morning, Yashpal Kapoor went to see Chief Minister Kamalapati Tripathi "Please wait in the drawing room, Kapoor Saheb," Lokpati, one of the two famous sons of Tripathi, told him "Babu [father] is at his morning puja Just wait for ten-fifteen minutes" Kapoor waited for about 20 minutes but the Chief Minister was "still at his puja" He grew fidgety, smoked cigarette after cigarette When another five minutes passed and

there was still no trace of Tripathi, he got up and walked out saying "*Babu ko kah dena itminan se puja karen, ab itna waqt dilwa diya jayega ki puja ke liye kafi waqt milega* " (tell your father to do his puja at ease, now he will be given so much leisure that he can do his puja as long as he likes) The import of the remark was not lost on the son, who rushed in and then rushed out saying that Babu had finished his puja But Yashpal had gone

Soon came the revolt of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and Tripathi government was swept off its feet The PAC of course had been simmering with discontent but people on the inside knew how the revolt had come about It was allegedly a joint handiwork of Yashpal Kapoor and Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, later to be the Chief Minister of the state and eventually another victim of Indira Gandhi's factotum Even as the streets of Lucknow were aflame, people who knew whispered around how the whole thing had been "masterminded by Bahuguna and financed by Kapoor"

Somehow part of the conspiracy leaked out to a national news paper and Indira Gandhi went wild with anger She had known everything, but it was one thing to conspire and quite another to be exposed What if people linked up her name with the sordid affair? She summoned Yashpal Kapoor and gave him a bit of her mind But he was not the one to be browbeaten by her

When she had had her say, Kapoor told her "I know very well what is in your interest If I hadn't, I would have remained a mere clerk "[2]

He had already come a long way when he became a lower division clerk in the mid forties But let him tell his own story[3] "I come from Chiniot, a village on the river Chenab That's the place the famous lovers *Soni-Mahiwal* came from " He gives a bellyful of laughter, offers his *India King*, lights one himself, and goes on "The village is about 20 miles from Lyallpur on the Sargoda-Lyallpur railway line My grandfather he was in the Northern Railway, a guard, quite a pioneer guard, he was on the first train on the Rawalpindi Peshawar line My father was in the PWD He was at Jahangira Road, I remember, looking after the cons-

[2]As told by Yashpal Kapoor to a close friend
[3]As told to the author in an interview

truction of roads I read up to primary there, then went to my grandfather in Rawalpindi

"There the Red Shirts, the *Khudai Khidmatgars*, were very active I have a faint picture in mind Panditji [Jawaharlal Nehru] had come there in 1938 and I had gone to Naushera Chhawni on my little cycle to see him I was nine years old I remember Panditji was not a very fluent speaker at that time My interest in politics started very early When I saw Panditji I told myself I would wear clothes like him My father was later transferred to Naushera Cantt I passed my matriculation from the Sanatan Dharam High School But soon my father lost his job, he became a victim of communalism and was sacked

"I used to participate in the processions of the Red Shirts Their meetings used to start with my patriotic poems My mother had been associated with the Arya Samaj I remember once I gave an extempore speech on Swami Sraddhanand at Naushera Cantt I won a prize of Rs 2 It was a great day for me" He laughs boisterously The bearer brings in steaming cups of coffee The richly furnished drawing room of his Pandara Road bungalow glitters with cutglass chandeliers and glass studded cushions

He lights another *India King*, reminisces a little and goes on ' It was a very hard life My father was jobless Once I remember there were elections of the municipal committee and one of my patriotic poems had been printed I had copied it from somewhere I read the poem at one of the election meetings and got Rs 7 as prize It was nearly 1 30 in the night when I returned home It s all very vivid I was just 12 years old That night I was sure my parents would thrash me My father opened the door Before he could say anything I said in a frightened voice that I had won a prize of Rs 7 I didn't get any thrashing, I was somewhat surprised Many years later my mother told me how that night they had sat up wondering where the next day's food would come from There had been no money in the house, and then I had come with seven rupees Their worries were over for the next day

"My mother's grandfather had gone over to Peshawar long ago He had some sort of cloth business there But my *Nanaji* [mother's father] had become a sadhu and left home In Hafizabad in district Guzranwala my great grandmother had a house My *Nani*'s father had been a *patwari* One of my great grandmother's sister had been married to a rich man who had the title of Raja Well, after

doing matriculation in 1944 I went over to Peshawar Later I went to Lahore on the look out for some business I began working in a stationery and book store and learnt the job of pen repairing That used to bring me an extra income of six or seven rupees per month In between, sometimes, I use to go with truckloads of sugarcane or grapes to Rawalpindi, about 85 miles away I used to sell the goods in the *mandi* It was a very uncertain business, the grape business The sugarcane thing was not so bad

"And then one day a police inspector turned up at the stationery shop He wanted to take paper without paying for it, that bloody so and so I refused point blank The chap went and reported against me, that I was selling paper in blackmarket They took me to the *thana* [police station], and clamped a DIR case on me they had it even then Finally my *Mama* [maternal uncle] came and bailed me out, but the inquiries went on for several months

"Towards the end of 1944 my father had come to Delhi His elder brother, my *Taau*, was in the CPWD [Central Public Works Department] He had said come to Delhi I will get you some work in the department In those days Lodi Colony was being built The CPWD Chief Engineer's son in law was the son of the Imam of Jama Masjid This boy had a share in some contracts My uncle told my father come I'll get you employed as the contractor's agent, and so my father became an agent

"About a year later I came to Delhi and got a 55 rupees per month job in a government store in Chelmsford Road, Connaught Place They used to sell ration cloth there And then one day a family friend said come I'll get you a job in the Supply Department He said he would take me to a Muslim officer '*Namaste karna aur kalma naukri chahiye*,' he told me I did just that and next day I was appointed That was April 1945, I was not even 16 years old It was a temporary job and six months later many of us were served with retrenchment notices We all gathered near the India Gate I was just a small, thin little boy, not like now [he runs his hand round his paunch and laughs] But there was the politician in me I stood up on a cycle and gave a little speech 'Let's march to C P Ramaswamy's bungalow,' I said Ramaswamy was the Supply Member of the Viceroy's Council Everybody liked the idea and so we marched in a body to the Queen Victoria Road bungalow of Ramaswamy He had gone to the Viceroy's House

for a banquet But we kept on waiting He returned at 1 30 in the night and drove straight inside We were not allowed to go in I climbed on top of the compound railing and started giving a speech Eventually Ramaswamy came out, heard our demands, and assured that we would be given some alternative employment When I returned home my father and mother were in the police station giving a report that I was missing from home!

'I was sent to the armed forces headquarters But while I worked there I was itching to do some political work In those days I used to live in Karolbagh Dr Ratanlal Sharda was a well known Congress leader I went to him He said, 'do some work' We formed a group of boys, named it the 'Lal Quila Group' In the evenings we would teach the bootpolish boys at some street corner We read out newspapers to them, sometimes went out cleaning the slum areas but this story will need several sittings We will go on with it some other time, but have another cigarette before you go " Another bellyful of laughter!

By the early fifties the young man had moved to the Prime Minister's Secretariat in South Block as a steno to C R Srinivasan, one of the private secretaries to Nehru Around 1954 55, recalls M O Mathai, 'we felt the need for a Hindi stenographer at Teen Murti House Srinivasan spoke to me well about this boy and so I asked him to send him [Kapoor] to the house Sometime later, I told Kapoor to help Indira with her correspondence, etc It was an entirely informal arrangement Another steno I had during those days was Seshan a routine man, but very different He was good in his work Kapoor? Don't ask me! He just wormed his way ingratiated himself Used to wear a Gandhi cap even in those days, this chap "

Yashpal Kapoor and N K Seshan used to sit in a small room in Teen Murti House and next to it Indira Gandhi had a room which she used as her office She was associated with a number of social and cultural organizations and gradually Kapoor began looking after all her correspondence A cheerful young man (he was around 26 years old then) always smartly dressed in khadi, Kapoor impressed Nehru by his neatness and discipline Soon he proved himself an obedient odd jobman completely attached to the Nehru household He became a faithful shadow of Indira Gandhi, always on the look out for an opportunity to do some errand for her

"Kap-ooo-r," she would call out from the passage or her room and he would run to her from wherever he happened to be After M O Mathai was thrown out of Teen Murti House amidst a cloud of scandals, Kapoor was the only member of the secretariat staff who was free to go in and out of Indira Gandhi's rooms

When Nehru died and Indira Gandhi became the *Minister for* Information and Broadcasting, she took with her Seshan and Kapoor Later, when she became the Prime Minister, Seshan was appointed Private Secretary for the South Block and Yashpal Kapoor for the house Soon all confidential work began to be entrusted to Kapoor and he even started running "political errands" for the Prime Minister When she finalized her first cabinet in 1966, he was the one man who knew all the details and until the time of the swearing-in he was not allowed to go to his own house But in any case, he hardly ever betrayed the confidence of his master

By the end of 1966 came the question of finding a suitable Lok Sabha constituency for Indira Gandhi She chose Yashpal Kapoor to go round Uttar Pradesh and assess which would be the safest constituency Kapoor went round Allahabad, Lucknow, and other places and finally decided that Rae Bareli would be the best for her Apart from being a backward feudal area, it had been the constituency of Feroze Gandhi and the people of the area had liked him This, Kapoor decided, would be the place where the Nehru charisma would work more than anywhere else, perhaps By the time he returned to Delhi, he already had the slogan that would go down best in Rae Bareli "*UP ki beti, Rae Bareli ki bahu*" (the daughter of Uttar Pradesh, the daughter-in law of Rae Bareli) All similar slogans of later years owed their origin to this one.

But who would be her election agent? "I will do it," said Umashankar Dixit Indira Gandhi agreed, but suggested that he should have a second full-time man for the elections Dixit already had several bees in his bonnet, the chairmanship of the Press Trust of India, managing directorship of the *National Herald* besides his Rajya Sabha membership

"I'll find out a person for you," said Yashpal Kapoor

He took another trip to Rae Bareli, came back after a few days, and told Indira Gandhi "I am going to work for your elections in Rae Bareli Here is my resignation letter " At that time he held

the rank of a section officer in the Government of India

She looked at him, read his resignation letter, and smiled "All right, you do it"

Kapoor put his heart and soul into the campaign, went spinning like mad from dawn till night from one village to another, returning to Rae Bareli covered with thick layers of dust Back in the somnolent town which he came to love so much, he would give himself up to the gods he worshipped

After the elections were over, he was at a loose end He told her he would like to live at Rae Bareli and give more time for her political work He had already shown his knack for politics, his capacity for organizational work He had even proved himself a good speaker, at least for rural crowds And he genuinely liked Rae Bareli

But all this work, it was put to him, could be done even from Delhi By the end of April he was back in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, this time as an Officer on Special Duty He continued there till he resigned again in January 1971, to be the Prime Minister's election agent again The date of this resignation was to become one of the two points on which Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court unseated Indira Gandhi on 12 June 1975

During her marathon cross-questioning in Sinha's court, Indira Gandhi was asked about the nature of work Kapoor had done in her Secretariat. She said it was the work "normally done by personal staff he might have done political work if by that term is meant receiving reports, attending to telephone calls or meeting people" She conceded that he might have attended to some of her political correspondence but "I would not accept that he looked after political correspondence not connected with government"

Kapoor, in his own evidence, which was later described by the court as an "admixture of half truths and untruths," had said that as Private Secretary he had to do "whatever work was given to me"

After the elections of 1971, Yashpal Kapoor had arrived He became so powerful that there was no need for him to go back to any government job He even sat at Congress Working Committee meetings and if she happened to be absent he would "advise" the Congress President and the Working Committee on what ought to be done

He had become the Prime Minister's political trouble-shooter, flying from one state capital to another to sort out the problems of the government and the party Whenever any Chief Minister approached the Prime Minister with any problems, she would tell him "All right, I'll send Kapoor" If some Chief Minister wanted her to visit his state for anything, she would say "Talk to Kapoor and fix the date with him I will give him the necessary instructions"

Out of sheer sycophancy, some Chief Ministers began suggesting to the Prime Minister that Kapoor should be made a Rajya Sabha member He was elected to the House from Uttar Pradesh During the UP elections of 1974, he became the "supreme controller of men and money"

In the intervening years he had "progressed" on other fronts too In late 1972, the Kapoors had acquired a sprawling double storey house in the posh Golf Links area It had been bought for Rs 4,75,000 but it was obvious to anybody that they had got it dirt cheap, according to the valuation of that time the property was worth at least Rs 10 lakhs The house had been bought in the name of Yashpal Kapoor's wife and his mother-in-law who was supposedly an importer of dry fruits"

In March 1974, Yashpal Kapoor arrived in Lucknow and parked himself in the Chief Minister H N Bahuguna's official residence His mission this time was to get K K Birla, the great benefactor of Sanjay Gandhi, elected to the Rajya Sabha Though an independent candidate, Birla had the blessings of Indira Gandhi

Immediately on arrival, Kapoor started his operations from the Chief Minister's house, which gave people the impression that the state government was also behind the business tycoon Bahuguna was away in New Delhi When he returned to Lucknow next day he learnt of what had been going on in his house, the political manoeuvrings by day and the wild revelries by night Strange women had been seen going in and out He flew into a rage What if he had once been a "fellow-conspirator" of Kapoor? What if they had shared many things in the past? Now he was the Chief Minister, a power in his own right, and he had to at least maintain the "sanctity" of the Chief Minister's residence

Bahuguna ordered Kapoor's luggage thrown out of the house Yashpal moved to the Clarks Avadh Hotel By then his friend,

K K Birla, had arrived with his entourage at the Carlton Hotel and had been "gheraoed" soon after by supporters of Raj Narain, who was the contender against him

Yashpal had gone headlong into his old game of buying legislators, but the Jat leader, Charan Singh, was equally set on ensuring the victory of Raj Narain And what irked Kapoor was that Bahuguna was not playing ball Three days before the polling, 51 Congress MPs had issued a statement in Delhi deploring the attempts to control politics through black money and calling for a "crushing defeat to Birla " Bahuguna had been in Delhi that day, and Yashpal Kapoor suspected that he had inspired the statement The very next day, intervening in a discussion in the UP Assembly on a privilege motion by two members of Charan Singh's Bharatiya Kranti Dal, Bahuguna told the House that his party had nothing to do with Birla's candidature and went on to express the hope that the industrialist would get a "shock "

K.K Birla was badly licked, and another nail had been driven into Bahuguna's coffin At a small tea party some weeks later in Patna, Yashpal Kapoor was heard saying "Our first priority is to throw that man [Bahuguna] out " It took some time to do it, but it was done

In course of his ministry-toppling and ministry-making exploits around the states, Yashpal Kapoor discovered his own local underlings to operate on his behalf His man in Lucknow had been a domestic servant of a Begum Sahiba While there, he had managed to learn typing and had gradually become the typist of a Minister of State, S P Singh, who in turn passed the man on to Yashpal Kapoor He had finally come to the right master Kapoor made him his PA Soon the man captured a suite of rooms in the Councillors' Residence, brought in two "singing girls" to live with him, bought an Ambassador car and became quite a man around town "*Bahut fit aadmi hai*" (a very competent man), Kapoor said of him "He brings money, brings women, he types and he drives absolutely fit " A multi-purpose man! He bullied ministers and officers, organized parties for his master whenever he was in town, and if Kapoor ever happened to have a drop too much, he would put him in the back seat of the car and drive him home

In Patna, Kapoor bought over an underworld character, a constable turned pamphleteer who had turned affluent by flatter-

ing and fleecing Lalit Narayan Mishra and, by his grace, landed *in the Bihar Legislative Council When Kapoor fell out with* Mishra, this man turned into a "double agent" While battening on Mishra's money, he allegedly played a treacherous role towards the former Railway Minister in his last days Another "fit" man!

If Yashpal Kapoor had tried to fashion himself after Feroze Gandhi, as many thought, Rajendra Kumar Dhawan was a clerk whose model must have been some ICS Burra Saheb He fancied himself the most powerful "bureaucrat" in the country!

Unlike Kapoor, his first cousin, who had got him inducted into the Prime Minister's Secretariat, Dhawan dressed himself in safaris or trousers and bush shirts, but no matter what he wore and no matter how much he was "Sir Sirred" by top officials and even Ministers and Chief Ministers he remained essentially a clerk That he wielded the kind of power that he did was more a reflection on the rottenness of politics and the administration in the country than the fault of this gentleman Indeed, if anything, he had done exceedingly well for himself

His very look is clerkish, which is no reflection on this class of people Some fine specimen of humanity remain clerks all their lives Dhawan has the look of that special tribe of clerks who thrive on under the table deals A slimy grin on their faces, everything about them a little oily

Dhawan emerged from the heavily *chikked* (bamboo curtain) verandah of Indira Gandhi's new residence on the Wellingdon Crescent Medium height, a little darkish but glowing with health, smoothly combed dark hair, thick moustache, Colgate smile, fortyish White terricot safari and white chappals to match In his hand half a dozen current account cheque-books and pay in slips Very Marwari like, one thought

"Let us sit outside and talk," he said, drawing up steel chairs under a tree A colourful marquee had gone up on one side of the compound and half a dozen men were struggling to put up a Swiss cottage in another part A group of old weather beaten peasants from Rajasthan sat on the ground in a corner of the shamiana, their group leader on a chair nearby All waiting for a "darshan" Everything to simulate the past glory of No 1 Safdarjang Road!

"I have nothing to hide," opened Dhawan, with a big smile, trying hard to exude confidence "My life is absolutely clean " One had not even suggested otherwise!

"Everybody seems to be writing books nowadays," he went on "There was a lady here the other day, she too wants to write a book on Indira Gandhi I too will write a book Not now, after all of them have finished Then I shall demolish them all " He seemed to know what exactly they would write, they would need to be demolished!

"All charges against me are baseless," he went on, beating a twig on the writer's watch dial to make his point "I challenge Desai [the new Prime Minister] to show a single man who may have given any money to *me* That is my biggest strength I never went to any receptions, never went to any parties, nor to any hotels and restaurants Not a single penny was collected by me " With every sentence he beat the twig on the watch More an indication of his nervousness than of his confidence in his innocence

From behind the *chik* emerges a wry-faced Brahmanand Reddy, Indira Gandhi's new Congress President Dhawan looks in his direction, reclines a little further in his chair, and goes on "I have not bought a single house in Delhi Let them find out Only I have a plot of land in New Friend's Colony, but I had become a member of the Cooperative Society as far back as 1963 My life is absolutely . "

Suddenly he went like a shot towards the *chik* Indira Gandhi was half out, half in, her face solemn Dhawan went in after her Ten minutes later he was back and one suggested that perhaps he would have more time to spare at his home "Home?" he asked "What home? I am with the Prime Minister from 8 in the morning every day to the time she retires, all the 365 days of the year I have not taken even one day's casual leave since 1963 No casual leave, no earned leave, no Diwali, no Dusserah I am always with the Prime Minister " It was amusing how he went on calling her the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for him was always "the Prime Minister," Morarji Desai was always just "Desai "

If there was any home for him it was there He never married, never had a home life M O Mathai, too, had never had a home, he, too, had remained a bachelor Both examples of utter devotion and loyalty One had turned pugnaciously critical, the other was still enveloped in charm

Dhawan would not give any credit to Yashpal Kapoor for having brought him into the charmed circle "In 1962, the Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi was just her father's hostess then] was made Chairman of the New York World Fair Advisory Committee The Ministry of Commerce sanctioned a staff of three persons for her—a private secretary, a personal assistant, and a peon Miss Usha Bhagat came as private secretary and I was appointed PA Earlier I had been a PA to the Maintenance Engineer of the All India Radio Now I am the Additional Private Secretary in the scale of Rs 1100-1600" He meant to say he was that until it was suddenly all over

Until 1971, Dhawan was just what he was meant to be—one of the several stenographers on the PM's staff Whatever special position he had till then was because of his closeness to Yashpal Kapoor Whenever Kapoor went out of station on his political assignments, which were becoming more and more frequent after 1969, he would assign some of his work to Dhawan When Kapoor finally left in 1971, Dhawan stepped into his shoes Sly that he was, he knew there was no point in trying to displace Yashpal from the Madame's confidence, Kapoor's stock was at its height then But there was another way of worming himself into the inner circle Just as Kapoor had become important at Teen Murti House by winning over Indira Gandhi, Dhawan now began courting the Young Master, Sanjay Gandhi, who he could see had immense hold on his mother

This very useful trick he had learnt from Lalit Narayan Mishra who himself was daily striving to rise in Indira's court Mishra began working on Sanjay Gandhi and his link to the boy was more through Dhawan than Yashpal Kapoor It was Mishra's inner line to Sanjay Gandhi which not only saved him in spite of all the concerted attacks on him but even got him promotion after promotion Hardly had a politician shot up so fast for so little reason as Mishra had done This was primarily because of Sanjay Nor had anybody fallen out of favour as fast as Mishra This, too, was because of Sanjay One of the first things that happened after Mishra's death in January 1975 was the sealing of his office room in Rail Bhawan because some documents connected with the Maruti transactions were there This had been got done by Sanjay and Dhawan with the knowledge of Indira Gandhi

Dhawan had broken off from the apron-strings of Yashpal

Kapoor. He had started operating on his own He had learnt the job too well, but he neither had the geniality of Kapoor nor any understanding of power politics Just a crude wheeler-dealer. "Money is no problem," he told Sanjay Gandhi At one stage the Young Master thought he could dispense with Dhawan and operate on his own, but Dhawan by then had touched another weak point of Sanjay Day in and day out he dinned into Sanjay's ears that he could become the Prime Minister after his mother Many years ago, the hangers-on of Nehru's court had flattered the little boy Sanjay by telling him that some day he would make a car of his own and he had believed it Now he was being told he could become the Prime Minister, and again he was taken in by the flattery Arrogance combined with low IQ can lead to delusions with disastrous results

A retired Inspector General of Police, Rajasthan, related the story of how Jawaharlal Nehru, on a holiday trip to Dehra Dun, visited a police training camp There some people were being interviewed for recruitment as constables and their IQ was being tested Sanjay Gandhi happened to be with his grandfather, and Nehru casually asked the police officers to test the boy's IQ along with the others Later, the IG committed the error of telling Nehru the result of the boy's test It was so "pathetically poor" that Nehru flared up "Why did you have to tell me this?" He was so agitated that he cancelled all his evening engagements

Dhawan, then, got a complete hold over the boy by continually selling the idea to him Everything that was done thereafter was geared towards "preparing the ground for the heir apparent" They began by purging or neutralizing such elements in the Prime Minister's Secretariat which could stand in the way of the prince

"There were many people in my Secretariat I shouldn't say *my* Secretariat. who were all the time giving a wrong picture of things to the Prime Minister," said Dhawan "I set this right. I saw to it that she got the correct picture of things" What he in fact did was to create such a wall around the Prime Minister that she could never see the reality

Dhawan and Sanjay Gandhi started weeding out the officers whom they suspected of "disloyalty" This process had begun much before the Emergency was clamped Slowly but steadily the "Punjabi mafia" had taken over

Dhawan also acted as a link between Sanjay Gandhi and Bansi

Lal in the early days, getting all the money and materials required for the Young Master's factory As Dhawan gradually got a stranglehold over the boy, and through him over Indira Gandhi, he started undercutting Yashpal Kapoor

The "Sanjay Caucus" of which Dhawan was in some ways the focal point did not want anybody to get close to Indira Gandhi Here it was helped by the Allahabad High Court judgment which dealt a blow not only to the position of Yashpal Kapoor but also the bumptious Chief Minister of West Bengal who had become the prince's *bete noire* "That playboy is responsible for my mother's humiliation," Sanjay had been heard saying soon after the judgment.

6

Dhirendra Brahmachari: Indira's Rasputin

He was the "Open Sesame" to Indira's court

He was the surest passport to No 1 Safdarjang Road, for saints and mendicants down to crooks and smugglers

No metal-detector ever bothered his white Toyota, no clock ever bound his visits, no rule ever limited his powers He was the Indian Tsarina's Rasputin, the ruling mafia's guru

A bull of a man, oozing vigour, draped in spotless white muslin, as white as the two hairy Pomeranians frolicking around him Come summer, come winter, that is the man's only attire, a shimmering veil for his "body beautiful" A mane of raven-black hair receding at the crown, a sinewy hand playing with smoothly combed beard Eyes sharp and crafty

Dhirendra Brahmachari, 50, has quite a physical presence, but one can see at first glance that he is neither a mystic nor a sadhu, much less a *brahmachari* (celibate) If anything, he has the look of a *bhogi* with much indulgences to his credit

The first person one runs into at his sprawling yoga ashram in New Delhi is a dark young man with a distorted face, looking tremulous He, too, is waiting for Dhirendra Brahmachari who is supposedly at his *puja*, somewhere inside his airconditioned apartment A man comes along with a year-old bonny baby and leaves it to play amidst the tables and chairs "Whose baby is that?" asks a prying visitor The man seems to weigh the question before replying "*Ashram ka bachcha hai*" (it's the ashram's baby) The

visitor is puzzled, but keeps mum Some minutes later enters a slim Punjabi girl, about 20, looking agitated "When can I see Swamiji?" she asks the man with the baby He looks away as though he hasn't heard her When she presses the question again, he says "I don't know You can try when he is by himself in the afternoon Go straight in, that's the only way"

Enters the beaming Swami, his Pomeranians behind him His eyes settle on the young girl in a hard stare and she slips out without a word

"Ah Joe!" he addresses the man with the distorted face "Why do you look so worried? I have engaged the best criminal lawyer of the city to fight the case Don't be upset, my boy"

So, this was Joe Menzes, the co-accused of Dhirendra Brahmachari in a case of bigamy and seduction filed by the husband of Kusum Ahuja, the ashram's *prima donna!* In his statement in the Metropolitan Magistrate's court, the husband, V V Ahuja, had described in lurid details the "compromising situations" in which he had allegedly seen his wife and the Brahmachari

"Don't you worry," the Brahmachari goes on "This is only the beginning of our troubles We'll fight them all"

When the Swami suddenly realizes there is a journalist around, his broad forehead gets furrowed and he sits up in his swivel chair

"I am not giving any more interviews I tell them one thing and they print another! They had been taught a good lesson That's what they deserved"

One tries a different tab One speaks to him in Maithili, his mother tongue, and asks him about his village in Bihar. His eyes get screwed at the question and his face hardens

He replies in Hindustani His tone is the same as of Sanjay Gandhi, rough and brusque

"I have no home, no village"

But surely he must have come from somewhere, must have had a name before?

Perhaps very few know his antecedents better than Hari Bhakt *Chaitanya, a disciple of Maharishi Kartikeya,* a yogi who lived in the Himalayas and is said to have died at the age of 350 in 1953 Hari Bhakt, who now runs his own ashram in the rocky backwoods beyond Ramakrishna Puram in South Delhi, claims to have taught yoga to Dhirendra

"He was not a *chela* of Kartikeya as he later claimed," says Hari Bhakt Chaitanya "He only cooked food for Kartikeya He was a wayward boy who had run away from his village, Chainpura in Darbhanga district, when he was only 13 years old As far as I remember his name was Dhir Chandra Chaudhary and said he was a Maithil Brahmin We began calling him Dhirendra

"After the Maharishi had passed away, I started teaching yoga at Jammu It was there that Dhirendra came and began requesting me to teach him, too He had worked for my guru and I began treating him like my guru bhai I taught him yoga but he could never go beyond the physical side of it That's all he was interested in—the contortions "[1]

In the mid-fifties, Hari Bhakt and Dhirendra went to Calcutta where they began taking yoga classes in the *maidan* Some years later they moved to Delhi and started a Vishwayatan Yogasan Kendra in Daryaganj By then the two had gathered quite an album of certificates from eminent people recommending them as "excellent teachers of yoga—the miraculous cure for all diseases " The younger of the two, Dhirendra, had proved himself quite clever in worldly ways even in those days, and with his handsome physique he had become quite a success with female disciples, of whom they had quite a few right from the beginning

In Delhi the two were inevitably drawn to the great Sadhu Samaj man, Gulzarilal Nanda, who in turn recommended them strongly to Jawaharlal Nehru "In those days," recalls Hari Bhakt, "Jawaharlalji was suffering from some ailments and was keen to try yogic exercises Both of us started going to Teen Murti House regularly That was around 1958 We had first met Panditji and Indira when they had gone to Pahelgam on a holiday "

The association with Nehru marked the beginning of Dhirendra Brahmachari's rise In 1959, the two of them organized a big yogic demonstration in a Delhi stadium to mark the establishment of the Vishwayatan Yoga Ashram This was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru and attended by many eminent leaders, including Jayaprakash Narayan, who had earlier undergone a 20 day course under the two swamis and written a foreword to Dhirendra's book (ghost written by a yoga enthusiast)

"Right there at the function," says Hari Bhakt, "the Minister

[1]In an interview with the author

of Education and Health promised to sanction government aid for the ashram " Soon the ashram was given an annual grant of Rs 20,000 by the Education Ministry Besides, they wangled a bungalow on the Jantar Mantar Road for the ashram, in spite of objections made by senior officers of the Housing Ministry Somehow their objection notes "vanished ' from the file and the house was allotted directly under orders from the Housing Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru was not the only one to fall for the swamis There was virtually a line up of VIPs wanting to take lessons from them "We taught Morarji Desai for a month when he was the Finance Minister, we taught Dr Rajendra Prasad and Jagjivan Ram and so many other ministers and high officials "

After Nehru had done the exercises for some days, Indira Gandhi also indicated her desire to learn "She had been watching the courses with great fascination Soon Dhirendra began teaching her "

Within a few months, Hari Bhakt found that he was no longer very welcome in Teen Murti House Dhirendra Brahmachari was the one who was in great demand there "He had also started all sorts of bunglings in the ashram accounts He would make false vouchers and bills and when I objected, he told me to mind my own business Soon he started opposing me in everything, and one day he said if I didn't want to 'co operate' with him, I could leave I didn't have the stomach for the sort of things he was doing I left and went away to Jammu "

But before he left he had seen some of the goings on at Teen Murti House "I had been shocked by the way Dhirendra was behaving there I feared the worst And not only me There were others who had begun talking about him in a derogatory way '

Hari Bhakt claims that from Jammu he wrote a letter to Indira Gandhi telling her that Dhirendra's association with Teen Murti House was creating a foul atmosphere and she ought to be careful. "I also wrote that she should show the letter to the Prime Minister I don't know if she did that but once when I visited Delhi I met Jawaharlalji and complained to him about Dhirendra But he was not willing to listen to anything against the man "

Incensed as he was against Dhirendra's "treachery," Hari Bhakt approached Morarji Desai, the then Finance Minister, and got the annual grant to the ashram stopped ' When Dhirendra learnt about it, he ran to Indira Gandhi and sought her help She

at once rang up Morarji Desai and requested that the grant should be resumed. She said she was willing to stand guarantee for the amount and it would be her responsibility if anything went wrong. And so he started getting the money again."

With Hari Bhakt cleared from the way, Dhirendra Brahmachari started managing the ashram in his own way He even used Teen Murti House as a platform to propagate himself. He would sit around the house for hours every day, seeking financial help for his ashram from people who went to visit Nehru. He had found quite a place to collect money and publicize himself

Nehru's death came as a set-back to the Brahmachari. Though he counted Lal Bahadur Shastri, too, among his "disciples" the little man was made of a different stuff. He was not the one to be fobbed by Tejas and Brahmacharis. The Education Ministry started an inquiry into the alleged mishandling of funds by the Brahmachari and he was evicted from the bungalow on the Jantar Mantar Road. For two days all his luggage lay piled up on the roadside He then moved his ashram to a house he rented in Defence Colony for Rs 800 per month. The promised grant of several lakhs for a training camp at Katra in Jammu and Kashmir was also cancelled.

With the "Return of the Red Rose" in 1966, the Brahmachari's stars rose again. He staged a come-back with a bang Not only was he reimbursed all the money (about Rs 29,000) he had paid as rent for the Defence Colony house, but was also given 1.8 acres of land in a prestigious residential area of New Delhi at a throw-away price. While the market price in 1968-69 was Rs 1,000 per sq. yard, it had been sold to him for less than Rs 10 per sq yard.

The Brahmachari's interest in politics was first seen during the general elections of 1967. He camped for nearly a month in Rae Bareli and went round the villages, perhaps to impress the poor folks that even "holy swamis" were behind the "Bahu of Rae Bareli." But the Brahmachari had still not quite arrived then, not yet the mod jet-set yogi that he was soon to turn into. There was still something of Kartikeya's cook left in him A Delhi journalist, who also spent a month in Rae Bareli, recalls how the Brahmachari would often cook food for him and Yashpal Kapoor.

That time spent with Kapoor did not go a waste. Apart from learning some useful lessons for his future operations, Dhirendra Brahmachari had established a better rapport with Kapoor who

was to be of immense help to him To begin with, their relations had been somewhat strained, they had been suspicious and even a little jealous of each other But gradually a tacit understanding had developed between them, they had agreed to live and let live, in fact to be of as much use to each other as they could If there was one person both had disliked and detested it was Feroze Gandhi, but he was dead long ago Then for some years there was Dinesh Singh and, again, both Kapoor and Dhirendra Brahmachari had loathed the man In their own ways both had worked to discredit and malign the arrogant Raja and had succeeded in eventually getting him out of the way

There was another initial hurdle in the Swami's way Sanjay Gandhi After his return from England, the boy had had several fights with his mother over men in her court whom he detested, but eventually they, too, had decided to live and let live And gradually the boy found that the Swami was after all not really worthless He was quite mod in his own way, loved the good things of life, had a bevy of beauties around him, had imported cars and in due course he was to acquire a flying beauty—a three seater "Maulle" aircraft which had come as a gift from its American makers who were quite sold on this jet-set Swami who claimed he could initiate them into the secrets of a long and healthy life

"Oh boy, what a Swami!" the two boys, Rajiv and Sanjay, are said to have exclaimed when they learnt about his new acquisition No wonder it was brought into the country without any import duty Soon the Swami and Sanjay and Maneka were all learning to fly the plane What great thrill! The Swami's airconditioned nook in the ashram became one of the favourite haunts of the rising son of India

Dhirendra Brahmachari had much to offer the boy, their tastes were remarkably similar Whenever they got bored with it all and wanted to "change the scene" as the hippies say, they would fly off to the Swami's new retreat in Jammu and Kashmir

Perched on a mountain ledge overlooking the beautiful Tawi river winding its way like a silver snake, the Tower Palace at Mantalai was an out-of-the-world pleasure-dome "Aparna Ashram," as Dhirendra Brahmachari had named it, was supposedly going to become the last word in yoga research That was the Swami's projected plan, as far as the public were con-

cerned But in reality it had already turned into the last word in "flesh comfort" This mythical honeymoon abode of Lord Shiva and Uma turned into a rendezvous of present-day pleasure-seekers The building was sound-proof, lavishly done up with imported furnishings, equipped with sauna baths and underground "meditation cells," all sound-proof and airconditioned The place, teeming with electric gadgets, had a "hot line" with Delhi and atop the tower was a siren! *Heavily financed by the* Education Ministry, the Swami's marble dreamland had cost over Rs 15 lakhs

In deference to Indira's Rasputin, the Defence Ministry, under special orders from Bansi Lal, opened its nearby airfield for "unrestricted use" by the Swami's planes The airstrip was a special gift to him from Bansi Lal—constructed to facilitate the VIP fliers Indian Air Force helicopters often carried the Swami and his VIP guests to the ashram His own "Maulle" aircraft would ferry his rich foreign disciples to Mantalai for an exotic experience These foreigners could easily build a replica of the place in their own lands, but where would they find a "vibrant human dynamo" like their Indian host?

For those who did not have the time to go to Mantalai, the Swami had built a 16-room airconditioned retreat right in New Delhi Called the "Yoga International House," it had turned into a veritable "vice den" for the Swami's exclusive clientele

The Swami's association with Indira Gandhi brought him rich dividends During 1969-70, his ashram got a government grant of Rs 30,000 In 1970-71, it shot up to Rs 1,89,875 After the great victory in the elections of 1971, the grant increased to Rs 3,42,727 According to the last figures given by the Janata Party government in June 1977, Dhirendra Brahmachari had received government grants of Rs 43 lakhs since 1967.

But this perhaps was nothing as compared to the gains in other ways As soon as it got around that he wielded great power in Indira's court, all sorts of people began flocking to him Politicians, businessmen, industrialists, smugglers, anybody who wanted anything to get done at the highest level went straight to the Brahmachari or Yashpal Kapoor or R.K Dhawan or Sanjay Gandhi—the gems of Indira's court "Whether it was licence or

libido," commented a Delhi journal,[2] "contracts or cabinet changes everything seemed to be solved by a single 'blessing' from the yogi The young penury stricken yogi of Calcutta had become a millionaire With two palatial ashrams in Delhi, a 100 per cent grant from ministries, cars and executive planes and a bevy of beautiful girls, he had given to himself all that yoga can give and more "

This jet-set yogi who spent hours every day teaching the intricacies of yoga to the "most powerful woman of the world" had his own style of divining and diagnosing the ailments of his "patients " Khuswant Singh of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* must have taken a salacious delight in putting it all down He described it lovingly

> He [Dhirendra Brahmachari] makes the patient lie on his or *her back He takes a string, places one end on the navel and* measures the distance between the navel and the right and the left nipple "Since ladies' breasts vary in shape and size and some droop, instead of navel nipple distance I measure the distance between the navel and the left and the right toe The navel is the centre of the 72,000 nerves in the human body The navel is like the pulse When I feel the navel, I can tell blind folded what is wrong with the person "

This navel divining Brahmachari was sent by the Government of India to the Osaka Expo in 1972 He took with him his beautiful ashram girl, Manju, a matriculate whom he had appointed a research officer on a salary of Rs 1,000 per month They brought back with them, as "gifts" for their great feats, a Toyota and a moveable swimming pool and bagsful of electronic gadgets—all free of custom duty

From his great chum, Bansi Lal, the Brahmachari got a beautiful black cow which he is said to have fed with 60 kilograms of apples every day The Jat bully had allegedly got the cow from a Jagadhri businessman, without ever paying him any money For his "black beauty" the Swami borrowed a special bull from the Delhi Administration, an imported Holstein Friesian breed worth Rs 10,000 When the Delhi Administration asked him to

[2]*India Today*, 16 30 June 1977

return the bull, the Brahmachari wrote "As it was difficult for the bull to bear the heat of Delhi, it has been sent to Katra (J & K) last month "

The man was undoubtedly a great source of pleasure But was that the only secret of the power he wielded? Recent disclosures about his various ashrams and his activities would indicate that there was much more to it than that Some years ago, this so-called yogi was caught emplaning at Palam with a pistol on his person and a bagful of money in his hand Around 1971, the customs authorities at Palam airport were alerted by Santa Cruz, Bombay, that a swami had taken off with 'some contraband goods" The Brahmachari was allegedly nabbed at the Palam airport but soon afterwards a functionary of the Prime Minister's house rushed to the airport and got him released

A six hour raid on the Brahmachari s pleasure retreat at Mantalai brought out a number of arms and ammunitions, including a revolver, a hunting rifle, and a telescopic rifle Were these part of the equipment for yogic research or was the Brahma chari, like his other friend, V C Shukla, running a Shikar company?

Apart from being a well greased pipeline between the underworld and the powers that be, the Swami was suspected to have played a key role in the dispersal of "big booty" According to some, he was the man who controlled the 'war chest" on behalf of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay

Whether he did this for them or not, he was unquestionably privy to many a dark secret of the court, an integral part of the mafia that pushed the country to a ruinous course

7

Rukhsana: "People Worshipped Me"

When Rukhsana went to see the new Lieutenant Governor of Delhi after the Emergency, he rose, saying "I must get up to receive one of the erstwhile rulers of Delhi!"

There was both sarcasm and truth in D R Kohli's remark He must have been curious to see the glamorous socialite who had made his predecessor dance around her bejewelled finger like a puppet Kishan Chand, a retired ICS officer, had never missed the chance to open the car door for this special envoy of Sanjay Gandhi He always bowed to her, addressed her as "Rukhsana Sultana Sahiba," and proclaimed at public meetings that she was not just a leader of Delhi but would soon become a national leader

Those were the days of glory for this 31-year old high society belle who had suddenly surfaced on the Sanjay tide "Wherever I went in the walled city," she says perkily, her chiselled nose in the air, "there were stampedes People fought with one another to stand next to me One day a young man came up and said he had not washed his hand for days after he shook hands with me My meetings were like Cleopatra's Durbar People worshipped me![1]"

She has no idea that her very name evokes murderous fury in the walled city of Delhi "If Rukhsana were to come here now,"

[1]In an interview with the author

said a 36-year-old widow of Jama Masjid area, "I'd personally let the dogs loose on her or I'd kill her myself"

If she was once described as the "Queen of the walled city" she is now more widely known as the "*Nasbandi* fiend" of Delhi. Her name is directly linked with all the inhuman stories of bulldozing and forced sterilization

But she dismisses them as "political vendetta" She goes and fetches a pile of photo albums to prove her great popularity, and as she turns the pages, she is overtaken by nostalgia "Just look at the crowds . people pushing from all sides, and those are rose petals showered from the balconies Look, there he is! How handsome he looks! I tell you he is one of the greatest leaders ever born I know he will come back with a bang All this witch-hunt can do him no harm"

She goes on raving with admiration for Sanjay, the "only person I took my orders from"

But she insists she was no courtier of his "Not at all I always met him on an equal footing I often disagreed with him We had our fights If I didn't like something I just told him 'Sanjay Saheb, I don't like this' and that was that But we were on the same wavelength Often he would say half a sentence and I would complete the rest of it" It was a made-for-each other sort of thing

And, for once, Sanjay Gandhi had met his own match in arrogance She thought she was the most beautiful and the most glamorous woman walking the earth She boasted that when she was studying at Miranda House she was "badly pursued by the entire university" Talking about Ambika Soni, one woman she hated like the plague, quite understandably, she said "A woman of my calibre does not bother about her sort Let her walk on the streets and test the response of the people I can cause a traffic jam" She went on to call Ambika Soni a woman who had started as a slogan shouting volunteer and 'wormed her way up from bed to bed'"[*]

Rukhsana was arrogant not only about her looks, her jewellery and her wardrobe, but also about her intellect! She had quit college half way because it had nothing to teach her "I was reading Byron when I was 12, Shakespeare at 15 Why the hell would I listen to all the twinkle twinkle stuff?"

[*] *Onlooker*, 15-31 May 1977

Though she was inspired by Sanjay Gandhi, she boasted that she had written at 13 what he professed at 30, and to prove her point brought out a magazine of the Wynberg Allen School in Mussoorie where she had studied It carried a prize-winning essay by a 13 year-old girl, Meenu Bimbet, stressing the urgency of family planning in the country Meenu Bimbet was Rukhsana's maiden name

Meenu Bimbet's father, Paddy Bimbet, was an officer in the Indian Air Force Himself a Hindu, he had married the elder sister of Begum Para, a Bombay film actress who had migrated to Pakistan after the partition Paddy Bimbet was for some years attached to the diplomatic corps which took him and the family to Paris Meenu Bimbet learnt to speak French and developed a taste for perfumes and fashionable dresses When they returned to India some years later, she found adjustment to the "new conditions difficult Meenu was stuck on going to the Sorbonne, but her father wouldn't let her "He was too stuck on my good looks, I was his favourite daughter" She was just a little over 16 years old when she fell in love with a boy and married him He was the grandson of Sir Shobha Singh, one of the builders of New Delhi Meenu Bimbet, who had changed into Rukhsana Sultana in order to inherit some property from her mother's side which she could not have done with a Hindu name, now became Rukhsana Singh

Two years later she had a daughter but by then the marriage had already gone to pieces "He was a no gooder, a crude insensitive man He had stolen my jewellery and the police had charged him with involvement in a highway robbery near Chail in the Simla hills"

That is the story Rukhsana tells about how she changed from Meenu Bimbet to Rukhsana Sultana to Rukhsana Singh When the marriage broke she managed to wangle for herself an apartment in Narendra Place on Parliament Street where she still lives

"A nest of divorcees," some call it Rukhsana's mother lives with her, while her father, Bimbet, lives his own separate life at Dehra Dun Also living with Rukhsana is her younger sister, Tahira Sultana, who would tell you that her husband was such a "cruel and brutish" man that she ran away from him The fourth

person in Rukhsana's flat is her beloved 13-year-old daughter, the child of her broken marriage But some allege this was not Rukhsana's only marriage, that she was earlier married to a Muslim another "short-lived and violent affair "

Rukhsana's mother, an older and chubbier version of her film actress sister, is incensed about what she describes as the "mud-slinging" on her daughter who had "worked like mad from morning till night for months on end only to be given a bad name " She is furious about the stories spread about Rukhsana the tales of her various liaisons Rukhsana herself flares up

> What have they not called me, the scoundrels! From nymphomaniac and lesbian to a prostitute and a call girl It's all the doing of these jealous Congress-wallahs, Subhadra Joshi and her ilk, all these great leaders who were shocked into silence when I entered the scene People just don't know what I am I object to being called even a socialite Rukhsana was the most elusive woman in town!

Her mother begins giving you an account of her own "feudal ancestry " She tells you her father was Mia Ehsanul Haque, the most renowned *Raees* (aristocrat) of Jullunder "My grandfather was Mia Ghulam Hussain who was a general in Ranjit Singh's army "

Rukhsana butts in to say her uncle, Abdul Hafiz Peerzada, had been a minister in Pakistan "We lived in sheer luxury in Jullunder As a little girl I would ride in my horse carriage through the market place and the passersby would just stare in admiration I was like a *shehzadi* [princess]!" But Rukhsana claims there was a sensitive soul in her, she was touched by the poverty on the streets 'Often I would slip out to the servants' quarters and see the families of our liveried servants living in rags I was very moved. Their poverty went to my head I wanted to work for the poor, I wanted to see all girls and all the women dressed up as glamorously as me "

When her marriage broke, this glamour girl who had a "sensitive soul" turned to jewellery trade! "I was always fascinated by jewellery They did something to me! Often I would take out my mother's jewellery, and do all sorts of things with them I would

take their little pieces apart and put them together in a new design *of my own* "

And that was how she became a jewellery designer! "I am the only woman jeweller in the country," she boasts, and brings out a cover story on her in a Bombay journal "You see for yourself That was long before the Emergency and yet they speak as though I was picked up by Sanjay Gandhi from the streets and made into something I was already a name in my own right!"

She did, indeed, have boutique and jewellery shops in Delhi and in Fort Aguada Hotel in Goa A fading signboard carrying the exotic name of the jewellery shop she ran in her Delhi flat now lies discarded outside the flat "*Dur-e-Shehwar*—Jewellery Boutique" The mirrored show-cases in the front room are all empty

"That's what I gained from all the work I did!" Rukhsana bursts forth "I lost my business Look at all those papers piled up I left everything to plunge into Sanjay's work I was inspired by the work he was doing That was something after my heart"

But her critics allege that she in fact made a fortune out of her association with Sanjay Gandhi, not only for herself but for her rich business friends too "She got anything she wanted for the mere asking Few people exploited Sanjay's name as she did"

Her very name puts off the old jewellers who have carried on their business in the lanes around Chandni Chowk in old Delhi "Don't talk of her! She just went around picking jewellery from us and then sold them in her fashionable shops for ten times the price During the Emergency when she could have any man picked up under MISA at a nod, we could not even press her to pay for what she took away from us All the big shots of the government were under that lady's spell!"

Rafi Ahmed, a young silver craftsman of Kucha Rehman in Chandni Chowk, alleged in a petition to the Union Home Minister, Charan Singh, that Rukshana owed him Rs 28,265 for various articles supplied to her She had given him two cheques as part payment but both had bounced When Ahmed pressed her for the money, she threatened him and allegedly put her "police hounds" after him He approached Sanjay and the Lieutenant Governor, Kishan Chand, but had only heard more threats from them

At a word from Sanjay Gandhi, the boutique owner had turned into the "queen of the walled city ' Some months after the Emergency, she had gone one day to Sanjay and told him she wanted to do some work for him Though she vehemently denies it, many knowledgeable people insist that Rukhsana had been taken to Sanjay Gandhi by his great chum, Navin Chawla, Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor "She had got involved in some scrape and had approached Navin Chawla and soon they had become great friends" is the version of a Delhi police officer

But it hurts Rukhsana Sahiba's *amour-propre* to hear that Chawla had put her on to her beloved leader She wouldn't have any go between where Sanjay is concerned It was like a voice from the heavens which had told this woman to follow the new star that had arisen on the country's horizon And so she had gone and asked him for some work She had heard, of course, that the great leader believed in "talking less and working more" and she had to show that she was not just a chiffon clad dazzler who just loved to sit and chat She had enough time to spare after her dates with the beauty parlours and the health club at the Ashoka Hotel Swimming? No, she just hated swimming, she said to prove how wrong reporters were One of them had gone and written in a journal that she had been seen clad in bikini at the swimming pool of a Bombay hotel "What lies! Bikini and me? I hate swimming"

But to return to Rukhsana and her great leader, she had straightaway asked him for work For several minutes he had just looked on at the woman, her stylish mop of hair, pearl necklace, dazzling diamond nosegay, long polished nails, and diamond-studded ring Sparkling all over, redolent with some exotic perfume "Go and work in the walled city," ordained the prince to his new found "Shehzadi"

Like the prince, who without any formal position, without as much as a four-anna membership of the Congress Party, had become the most powerful man in the country, the dazzling socialite became the virtual ruler of Shahjahan's walled city She took the area by a storm It was a new experience for the *burqa*-clad women whose little world had hardly extended beyond the lanes and bylanes of Chandni Chowk to see this gorgeous Muslim lady walking through the streets, with officers and policemen running behind her Scores of spineless young men who were

itching to get close to Sanjay Gandhi started scurrying around this woman Lalit Makan and Tytler and all the other so-called Youth Congress leaders of Delhi vied with one another to be in the same car with her or to be in the same picture

Rukhsana was soon in the forefront of Sanjay Gandhi's "task force" Hundreds of people flocked to her "headquarters" at Dujana House, which turned into the biggest "*nasbandi* centre" of old Delhi, to seek one favour or another Word had gone around that she not only had direct access to Sanjay Gandhi but was almost his "alter ego' Nothing that she would do would meet his disapproval!

With the Lieutenant Governor and his Secretary, Navin Chawla, always at her beck and call, the other officers of the area became her personal menials Two of the police inspectors of the area were said to have become her "blue-eyed boys" They accompanied her through the lanes and bylanes, went to her meetings, carried out her commands, and were so lost in attending to this *Qatil Shola e-Shabab* (murderous flame of beauty), as one local Urdu newspaper described her, that they forgot they had any other duty

Rukhsana, they say, had her own inimitable style of "motivating" people for sterilization She would think nothing of coercing the businessmen—"all the fat *lalas* of Jama Masjid," as she contemptuously calls them—into making presents of clocks radios, and other things as "incentives" for sterilization Anybody who tried to be difficult was threatened with arrest under MISA All her actions were in the name of Sanjay Gandhi, the source of her limitless powers!

Rukhsana had her own way of enlisting her men for her "task force" She would allegedly get some innocent people of the area arrested under one charge or another and then she would intervene on their behalf and get them released Having turned these people into her "admirers" she would take them into her team It was a bizarre group of people she had collected round her Along with the innocent victims of Rukhsana's hamhanded police officers, there were pimps and racketeers and hoodlums, all rolling merrily on the Sanjay-Rukhsana bandwagon

"I was the first woman," she brags, "to be tied a *pugree* by the topmost khalifas of pahelwans They described me as the 'light of the walled city' They had never given this honour to any other woman before!"

She was so impressed by the great devotion of the police inspectors who had been assigned to her that she recommended one of them to be made a Superintendent of Police At a public meeting she had taken a garland offered to her and put it round the police inspector's neck as a token of her admiration for his work In spite of all her arrogance and the new sense of power, there was something in her perhaps which made her still fear police inspectors It could have been a fear that had stuck in her mind during the days when she was all too frequently interrogated by police inspectors of the Parliament Street police station in connection with a variety of scrapes including the ones with her former husband

The brazenness with which this socialite went about lording it over the people in the old city alarmed the old Congress leaders of the area Mir Mushtaq, an old timer of the Congress and Chief of the Metropolitan Council, was flooded with complaints against the woman's doings He soon learnt that Navin Chawla was instructing the local authorities to obey the orders of the woman The Lieutenant Governor had himself declared publicly at Dujana House "that anybody who tries to stand in the way of Rukhsana Begum Sahiba will be smashed"

Mir Mushtaq had on several occasions written to Indira Gandhi requesting her to stop the activities of her son and her agents, but there had been no response Instead of improvement, the situation had kept getting worse

Another person who was deeply concerned was Subhadra Joshi, the then MP from Chandni Chowk "Every day people would come to me with all sorts of complaints against this woman,' said Joshi,[5] a pro CPI Congress leader who had begun by support ing the Emergency and turned into one of its most strident critics after it came to be realized that the Emergency was just another name for "Sanjayvad" Subhadra Joshi had no idea how this glamour girl' had suddenly popped up "I believe she told everybody that she was the Private Secretary to Sanjay Gandhi Suddenly she was going about holding meetings, collecting money, threatening people And she was always escorted by police officers Everybody knew that she had come with direct orders

[5]In an interview with the author

from Sanjay Gandhi No, I never met her but I am told by people I trust that she is a call-girl "

Ambika Soni, the Youth Congress President, went and told Sanjay Gandhi that she had received lots of complaints from people against Rukhsana

Sanjay, according to Ambika Soni,[4] haughtily retorted "She [Rukhsana] can do no harm, she is the best social worker "

Even R K Dhawan was piqued by the great importance that Sanjay Gandhi gave to this social coquette who had turned into a "social worker " He claimed[5] that he had always "disapproved ' of Rukhsana "She is one person I never talked to, never approved of," he said

But Sanjay Gandhi was obviously sold on her, and she on him "What can I do if he inspired me?" she said, raving over her leader, still pure and innocent in her eyes "I can only work for somebody who is better than me and there is none in any other party "

She said she had often gone and cried before Sanjay Gandhi and told him about the mud-slinging that the people, mostly Congress leaders themselves, were doing about her "But he always told me not to bother about what people said Just keep your head high "

With Sanjay at her back, she went into the "*nasbandi* campaign" with fiendish energy In less than a year over 13,000 sterilizations were carried out at the Dujana House camp alone It was something like a mass butchery Said one account in a Bombay journal.

> The more inhuman aspect of the sterilization story lay in the herding of people in a dozen tin beds in a basement room in Dujana House There were those classic *kurtas* with a strategic aperture for exposing the private parts A certain Dr Bannerjee, with his ambitions set on a political reward, made incisions on five to six patients at a time He then called in other doctors to tie and tidy them up Terror-stricken villagers who were herded in by target bound and fee hungry motivators were huddled in and out of the make-shift operation theatre

[4]Ambika Soni in an interview with the author
[5]In an interview with the author

The boastful woman says

> You can't realize how much work went into convincing the people before the sterilization camps were even set up Imagine me walking through the stinking *gallis* [lanes] convincing the *burqa*-clad women that sterilization and abortion were not against Muslim religion I told them that it takes three months for souls to descend into the embryos and so there was no question of killing a soul if an abortion was done in the first three months It took me six months dinning all this into the people before we started the camps The people there just loved me They started calling me Rukhsana *Baji* [sister] They presented me with honour rolls and some people even wrote poems on me, describing me as "*Garibon ki Rahnuma*" [protector of the poor] But what an ordeal it was! The stench and filth all around I used to pour a bottle of perfume on my body before I went out every morning so that I could not smell anything but my own perfume You know it used to take me an hour and a half to walk from Turkman Gate to Jama Masjid, the same time it would take me to fly from Delhi to Bombay! Nobody can imagine how hard I worked!

Rukhsana's "biggest catches" were two Imams whom she persuaded to undergo sterilization There was a lot of ballyhoo about the great achievement and pictures of the two Imams flanking Sanjay Gandhi were seen in several newspapers all over the country But only the day after the sterilization, one of the Imams returned to the camp with a terrible haemorrhage He was saved, but hundreds of others in Delhi are alleged to have died unattended after developing post sterilization complications

Mir Mushtaq has compiled a list of young unmarried people who had been forced to undergo sterilization at the Dujana House But if you asked Rukhsana Begum, there had been "absolutely no excesses in Delhi! Maybe there were atrocities and excesses in other parts of the country, but in Delhi, no It was just a bunch of jealous old fogies trying to malign me and Sanjay Gandhi!"

Rukhsana, who claims she has turned down many offers of film roles—she doesn't say whether of heroines or vamps—from I S Johar and others, is convinced that her leader has a "bright political future" and with him she too would be back in politics Though

she insists she was never in politics, she concedes that she had made one of her hangers on the General Secretary of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee She herself was her prince's candidate for the Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha seat But all too suddenly the "light of the walled city" went off The days of glory had passed

8

Khidmatgars and Cronies

They came in all shapes and sizes—the dominoes of Indira's court, the khidmatgars of the mother and the son and the holy caucus! Burly Afghan adventurers with sword cut moustaches, loose-limbed vassals from Kashmir, dim witted turbaned Gyanis from Punjab, *sloka* rattling pundits from the hills of Uttar Pradesh, dark bumbling vulgarities from Bihar, money-grabbing pseudo-philosophers from West Bengal, incense bearing flatterers from Karnataka, and a host of kowtowing politicians and civil servants, so-called Some had come down from the days of Nehru, some acquired during the great "decade of progress," and some were gems picked up by Sanjay Gandhi From Nehru to Indira to Sanjay, a bizarre assortment of courtiers had flocked to the party as if to a natural haven Their doglike loyalty had brought them windfalls they could never have expected in their wildest dreams

Sixty-one year-old Mohammad Yunus who looked, according to a perceptive journalist,"more like a Dewan of Indira's court than her Special Envoy," had come to Nehru via Abdul Ghaffar Khan and got stuck at Teen Murti House In the early forties he was tall, slim, and handsome and had sported a Khalil Gibran beard He became almost a shadow of Nehru Pictures of Jawaharlal with Indira and Yunus are like a constant refrain in Teen Murti House photo albums of the period

Soon after Independence, the Pakistan Radio had started campaigning that the Indian Muslims were facing all sorts of

difficulties in going for Haj, and Nehru had been upset about the propaganda One day he came to Teen Murti House for lunch, worried about the Pakistani tirade He was thinking hard of some way to counteract it He saw Mohammad Yunus and suddenly a thought occurred to him

"Why don't you take the job of looking after the Haj pilgrims?" he asked his young retainer from Afghanistan

Jawaharlal went to the South Block, called for the Secretary-General, Girija Shankar Bajpai, and suggested that Mohammad Yunus could do the job of looking after the Haj pilgrims on an ad-hoc basis

"Why not employ him?" asked Bajpai

And so Yunus was appointed to the Indian Foreign Service Feroze Gandhi always described him as the "Haj IFS" Fond of pulling Yunus' leg, Feroze used to say that Yunus had been told by doctors that if he were ever to have a fall, he should try and fall on his head because that part of his anatomy would never break, it was so rock-hard!

Loyalty to the Nehrus was his only forte and it took him far and wide—and high He was so close to the family, specially to Sanjay, that when he got married, the ceremony was held not at No 1 Safdarjang Road but at 12, Wellingdon Crescent—the house of Mohammad Yunus which he was later to vacate for the family in distress

During the Emergency, the Special Envoy became the special drum beater of the heir apparent He described as "ridiculous" all the stories about Sanjay Gandhi being "groomed" for high office There was simply no need for grooming the Young Master, was what he meant "Who grooms whom?" he asked in a special article he wrote for a Bombay journal "A stupid prince may need coaching to wave and smile or conduct himself well in the court, but you cannot apply this to some one exposed to public gaze day in and day out—in the slums, in a factory or in the fields "[1]

By then Sanjay Gandhi had been on his "barn-storming" tours *round the country for months His Youth Congress had, in his* mother's words, stolen the thunder from the Congress Party

On 10 January 1976, just about a fortnight after his public debut at the Kamagatamaru Congress session at Chandigarh, Sanjay

[1] "Sanjay I Know," *Blitz*, December 1976

Gandhi was given a massive reception in Bombay Also attending the meeting was Anura Bandaranaike, son of the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, who proclaimed proudly that Sanjay Gandhi and he himself were entering "politics at the same time and we wish each other tremendous success"

Next week, he was in Bangalore, where the Chief Minister, Dev Raj Urs, said it was a "unique event" for the state that Sanjay Gandhi was there in person Government planes had dropped leaflets to publicize the prince's arrival and the entire cabinet of ministers was lined up for a guard of honour to the heir apparent

In Bhopal next month, the traffic remained dislocated for hours on end on the occasion of Sanjay's visit, schools and colleges were shut down, restaurants and hotels were forcibly closed down to enable the employees to attend the prince's meeting, and the Vidhan Sabha curtailed its hours of scheduled business Shyama Charan Shukla was not going to remain behind his younger brother in sycophancy to Sanjay Gandhi!

"Get down to work or get out," the prince shouted to a gathering of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee The brash man had begun to show his great hurry to take over. There was no mistaking the objective of the young man and his storm troopers

Even the subdued whispers about the hereditary trend enraged Indira Gandhi's Special Envoy who had suddenly become an expert on the media "If a Kennedy follows a Kennedy," he said as though he were making a profoundly ironical statement, "or a Churchill follows another Churchill, that's all right But if it happens in India everybody says it is undemocratic Why, a political party would be crazy not to take advantage of the way that boy appeals to the masses"

The Congress Party and the Indira government were showing every day that they were far from crazy The Union Home Ministry, which was virtually run by the Sanjay caucus from No 1 Safdarjang Road, with the obedient poker faced Kashmiri, Om Mehta, as a mere front and obedient khidmatgar, sent out circulars to all the state governments, the union territories, and the Indian Airlines directing them to put the security arrangements for Sanjay Gandhi at par with the Chief Ministers and the Union Ministers The circular asked the airport authorities to adhere to the instructions issued by the Director General of Civil Aviation in his letter dated 3 February 1969 These instructions were specifically

meant for the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister, the Union Ministers, and the Chief Ministers By making a public show of their sycophancy, the Chief Ministers and the Union Ministers (with rare exceptions) had proved that Sanjay Gandhi was way ahead of tehm in power They were just his minions

If a prize were to be offered to the biggest khidmatgar of Sanjay Gandhi, Narayan Dutt Tewari, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, would certainly be a strong contender and might even run away with it People in Lucknow vividly remember the great welcome Tewari organized for Sanjay Gandhi when he first visited the city in early 1976 According to one correspondent who covered the visit, the state government deployed about 600 trucks and buses to carry the mercenary crowds (their rate Rs 5 per head and a packet of *puris*) to the Amousi airport where the entire cabinet, the Governor, and the Assembly Speaker stood at attention for the prince's arrival The plane had not even come to a halt when the crowds rushed on to the runway and all security arrangements went haywire In the melee, Narayan Dutt Tewari was seen running towards the plane with a big garland in his outstretched hands He was so excited he didn't see the thin rope that the security men had tied across the runway to cordon off the crowd He ran into it and fell flat on his paunch, the garland crushed under him But he immediately got up and ran, panting to the stairway

Sanjay Gandhi and Maneka alighted from the plane followed by a trail of ministers in-waiting, and a former PA of Chandra Bhanu Gupta who had been sacked for corruption carrying the bags of Maneka

At a grand reception at the Begum Hazrat Mahal Park that evening, Narayan Dutt Tewari began by quoting the first *sloka* of the *Bhagavad Gita* "*Dharmachetre Kurukshetre* " (On the righteous field of Kurukshetra, gathered together, eager for battle, what my people and the Pandavas did, O Sanjaya?) What was he going to say? wondered the crowd They were soon to hear

"It is the same Sanjay here with us today," Tewari went on, foaming at the mouth "This Sanjay is gifted with the same divine vision In his veins runs the blood of Motilal Nehru and Swarup Rani, the blood of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, in him you can hear the thunderous roar of Feroze Gandhi . . ." His thick lips twisted as he spoke, and a correspondent made the

rather unkind remark that "he has spoken so many lies as Chief Minister that his whole face has become distorted "

On a whistle stop tour through three districts of Uttar Pradesh the prince's airconditioned limousine was followed by more than 350 cars and jeeps It was a great "cut throat competition" led by Tewari to be close to Sanjay Gandhi At every two miles or so, the long motorcade would come to a screeching halt, and the entourage would rush out in blinding dust Sanjay Gandhi would emerge from his limousine, mount a flower bedecked rostrum, and start his famous four line speech The English rendering of the two-minute drills makes them sound far more respectable than they really were—a queer mixture of Bansi Lal Yunus-Arjan Das intonations In short, sheer banalities "Brothers and sisters, we have to sow trees [Can't somebody tell him that *per boye nahi jate, lagaye jate hain?* a listener once remarked sotto voce] we must sow lots of trees, we have to do away with the 'dirty superstition of dowry' and people who oppose our programmes have to be rooted out . *unki netagiri ko ukhar phekni hai* We must talk less and work more Jai Hind "

And off the motorcade would go, leaving the village folks who had waited for hours on end wondering what the big show was all about!

On one of his many visits to Uttar Pradesh, a commandeered crowd waited early in the morning at the Kasia airstrip in Deoria district After a while a plane circled the ground, landed and taxied to the far-end of the airstrip Out came Tewari and a couple of his lieutenants—they all have their cronies, all the way down the line! Everybody waited with bated breath for Sanjay Gandhi A plane was sighted through the winter morning fog This one needed no circling of the airstrip, it just swooped and landed with a thud so hard that sparks flew from the tyres The pilot was Sanjay Gandhi who was to take command of an Indian Airlines flight Emerged the bumptious young man with a flair for adventure, who once claimed he had driven a Maserati at 170 m p h That was during his wild days in England

Narayan Dutt! he called out brusquely, without any prefix or suffix, Tewari needed none as far as Sanjay Gandhi was concerned

Tewari was already before the Young Master, his capped head bowed, his folded hands vibrating with nervousness

"Very bad weather," said the man of few words

"Yes, Sir, very bad weather, very bad weather," Tewari gasped, nodding his head in assent, his hands still fluttering "Very bad weather, Sir, but in two hours all right, Sir, absolutely all right"

The trucks which had carried the crowds had been camouflaged in the sugarcane fields around Very thoughtful of the officers, it must have given the impression that the crowds had gathered on their own

Once again hundreds of cars followed the prince's procession from Deoria to Faizabad to Jaunpur to Rae Bareli Could anyone doubt that the bandwagon was rolling?

But why pick on Tewari alone? It was the same story almost everywhere If the Uttar Pradesh government spent an estimated four crores of rupees on the half a dozen visits of Sanjay Gandhi to the state, the government of Rajasthan spent nearly a crore on just one visit to the pink city Hardeo Joshi had initially tried to put up a show of "independence' but having scented danger he had become more servile than many others Anxious to outdo the other Chief Ministers he transformed Jaipur almost overnight into a city of arches—501 of them, each of a distinctive design A long flyover was covered from end to end with a silver archway According to one estimate, at least 1,000 buses and trucks were requisitioned by the government, and "most of the operators were not paid even for diesel"[2]

The police bandobast for Sanjay Gandhi for his visit to Patiala on 15 January 1977 was even more elaborate than for the Prime Minister A 40 page cyclostyled circular was issued for security arrangements The police force mobilized included eight superintendents, 33 deputy superintendents, 55 inspectors, 27 sub inspectors, 480 head constables, and 3 021 constables "A day before the visit, the police authorities forced every house owner and shop keeper to give an undertaking in writing that their families would take the responsibility to see that nothing untoward happened while Mr Gandhi's motorcade passed their areas Shopkeepers who declined to give the undertaking were humiliated and in some cases even arrested'[3]

Gyani Zail Singh went from meeting to meeting, telling the

[2]*Times of India*, 9 May 1977
[3]*Ibid*

people that "*Desh ke mahan neta*, Sanjay Gandhi, has a great personality, a grass-root level organization and a programme" He kept urging the great leader to "plead Punjab's case with the Union government so that it got substantial assistance"

Back at No 1 Safdarjang Road, New Delhi, Sanjay Gandhi would receive streams of petitioners every day for "three-minute audiences" As William Borders, the *New York Times* correspondent, described, the brash young man was "like a Tammany boss, nodding sympathetically, questioning sharply " Nobody doubted that he was being promoted as his mother's successor

Behind all the public and private adulation, more serious operations had been going on to capture the key position in the government The centre of operations, Delhi, had already been packed with dominoes

Kishan Chand had been selected for the post of Lieutenant Governor of Delhi by his Secretary, Navin Chawla!

Thirty-year old Chawla was a buddy of Sanjay Gandhi They had met in London where Chawla was a graduate student and Sanjay a weekend visitor from the Rolls-Royce factory in Cheshire They had had a rumbustious time together On return to India, Navin Chawla had got into the IAS while his VIP friend was preparing to become the Ford of India in the junkyards of Delhi

Chawla himself was an ambitious young man His close friends say he thought himself to be "something of a Napoleon and a great woman-killer" He had other contacts with the Prime Minister's house besides his friend, Sanjay Gandhi He was a nephew of a prominent lady functionary of No 1 Safdarjang Road, and some said his mother, a lady doctor in Defence Colony, had been one of the doctors who had delivered Sanjay Gandhi In any case, Navin Chawla had got a foothold for himself in the Prime Minister's house and had established a very chummy relationship with R K Dhawan

When Sanjay started having political ambitions, Navin became one of his closest "official advisers" As the Additional District Magistrate of South Delhi, he was the officer who had "sealed" the marriage of Sanjay and Maneka at Yunus' house He knew these were the sure ways of moving up in life

Chawla was one of the persons who impressed on Sanjay Gandhi

that he must begin his operations from Delhi "If you control Delhi you control the rest of India" By the middle of 1974, Delhi had started becoming troublesome, what with the JP movement threatening to catch up with the capital and the railway strike causing all sorts of law and order problems for the government Navin Chawla and Dhawan started working hard on Sanjay Gandhi to get the then Lieutenant Governor, Baleshwar Prasad, *chucked out* "He can never be loyal to Mrs Gandhi or to you He is a Kayastha from Bihar, a JP man" The Congress Party too was under pressure from their communist partners to get rid of the "JP sympathizer"

Prasad, known to be a tough nut to crack, had also been difficult over some suggested postings and transfers The caucus had to get someone who would play ball And then one day Baleshwar Prasad got three calls on the Rax telephone in quick succession from Umashankar Dixit, the then Home Minister, asking him to resign When he did not comply with these verbal orders from her Muneemji, Indira Gandhi herself sent for Prasad and told him she was 'thinking of something else" for him Prasad sent in his resignation on 4 October 1974

Navin Chawla had in the meantime invited Kishan Chand to his Defence Colony house for dinner with R K Dhawan At this dinner, Chawla and Dhawan 'interviewed' Kishan Chand and selected him for Lieutenant Governorship A retired ICS officer, Kishan Chand had been on an assignment with an UN agency but there he had run into "difficulties" and the chance to be Delhi s Lieutenant Governor was a godsend He was so overwhelmed that he remained grateful and subservient to Dhawan and Navin Chawla till the last Finding himself in hot waters after the sudden fall of the Congress government, Kishan Chand reportedly told the new Home Minister, Charan Singh "I was not involved in anything, Sir My Secretary was my boss"

Apocryphal though this statement may be, it was certainly true to a great extent Kishan Chand was content to play the second fiddle to his Secretary He was quite satisfied at the end of his career to be able to live in Raj Bhawan and pay court to the courtiers of Sanjay Gandhi

That left Navin Chawla free to lord it over the Delhi Administration He became a "super administrator' taking his orders directly every morning and evening from Sanjay Gandhi and as their

stranglehold grew stronger he thought he was close to his ambition of becoming the Home Minister of "Prime Minister Sanjay Gandhi" The "Napoleon" who was off loaded at Santa Cruz from an international flight was a bundle of shattered dreams

It almost become the style of the Sanjay caucus to function mostly through the second in command in different areas The operative man in the Delhi Administration was Navin Chawla, in the Union Home Ministry it was Om Mehta Like Kishan Chand, Brahmanand Reddy was a cypher "Omji," as Indira Gandhi called him, was more the errand boy type that Sanjay liked He had given sufficient indication of being a man who would do their "dirty job" without asking any questions He was a willing cat's paw

This 50 year old politician from Kistwar, Jammu, was made the Minister of State for Home within a week of the change in the Delhi Administration The "right people" were being placed in the right places Brahmanand Reddy too was inducted the same day—10 October 1974—to play the dumb man at the top!

Om Mehta claimed[4] that he was "most reluctant" to go to the Home Ministry and it was only at the great persuasion of D P Dhar that he had accepted "I had preferred Defence Production or something, but DP said that since she wants you so much you should accept the offer "

"I should not have accepted it," he went on in a sad, low-cast voice "I had such good relations with the opposition leaders Even with Raj Narain In the Prime Minister's Lok Sabha elections in 1971, he [Raj Narain] used to have his breakfast with me at Rae Bareli "

His regret could have been genuine, but he carried little conviction when he claimed that he was "not dealing with law and order I dealt only with the scheduled castes and tribes, languages, etc" These, it was well known, were just the subjects that his senior Brahmanand Reddy, had to content himself with Mehta tied himself up in knots when the very next moment he added that he was of course always called to the cabinet meetings and "some files were routed through me to Reddy" Was he called

[4]In a post-election interview with the author

to the cabinet meetings for discussions on scheduled castes and tribes? For an answer there was just a sad smirk on his face

Though his great grandfather had been a General in the Army of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir and his grandfather a Governor of the area to which they belong, Om Mehta himself had had a hard beginning in life His father had given up the Maharaja's service to join politics and the family jagirs were later taken over by the state He had come to Delhi for college studies and taken a minor job as the Manager of a cooperative store in Connaught Place He had met Jawaharlal a couple of times and it was he who sent him to Kashmir at the time of the first Pakistani aggression to organize works camps for refugee women

Mehta gradually moved to the Upper House of Jammu and Kashmir and was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1964 He proved his loyalty to Nehru's daughter from the very beginning "I was the convener of the Backbenchers' Club formed in 1965 and Mrs Gandhi was our nominee for prime ministership in 1966 We mobilized support for her Even in 1969, it was the same group which organized support for Mrs Gandhi "

But all that was not enough to gain the full confidence of Indira Gandhi She had her own way of testing and retesting people's loyalties She would give a little job to somebody and see how he did it Then for some months she would watch him Was he showing off to people? Was he spilling the beans? If he did none of these things, she would again give him some confidential job

Om Mehta had often been used by her for conveying "secret messages" to state governments and party organizations He had acted as a ' conveyer of her desires ' and by 1974 75 he had become her "confidence man " He never bragged, never threw his weight about What was even more important, he had no scruples, no mind of his own But he knew well enough which way the wind was blowing He was aware that Sanjay was the rising star, the man of the future He promptly hitched his cart to the prince's wagon But he never really got into the innermost ring at the court, he always hovered on the fringes of the second ring, happy when he was taken in for certain operations He was a useful front man for behind the-scene operators who had all the powers but were answerable to none

There had been many others trying hard for years to worm

their way into the charmed circle One was D P Chattopadhya, a ponderous young man with a smooth exterior With his background of lecturership in philosophy, he had made a "logical study" of the ways of getting to the top and had come to the philosophic conclusion that the more funds one was able to raise for the "party" the better his chances of going up the power ladder His predecessor, Lalit Narayan Mishra, had left quite a legacy, including officers like N K Singh, who were masters of all the tricks a minister needed to know

Chattopadhya, with the help of his expert team of bureaucrats, made a "thorough study" of the jute and cotton interests in the country and came up with the finding that they were only too willing to come to agreements which were in the ' best interests of all concerned "

When the bespectacled ex-teacher made his first alleged "catch," he thought he must use at least part of it for his political advancement But he was still a novice and didn't know how to go about it He made an appointment with Indira Gandhi and arrived at No 1 Safdarjang Road at the allotted time with a briefcase in his hand As an "insider" of the Prim · Minister's court described it, Chattopadhya went straight to Indira Gandhi and made his offering across the table Indira Gandhi flared up "I have nothing to do with all this Dixitji is the Treasurer Go to him " Later, Indira Gandhi asked Dixit to explain to the young man the way to do things

Reports in a Bombay journal[5] on the alleged operations of Chattopadhya and his cohorts indicate how well and how fast the man had progressed Some excerpts from this story of "massive loot" bear reproduction

> Most of the looting was organized by the State Trading Corporation and the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation STC Chief Parikh is reported to have gobbled over a crore of rupees He unsuccessfully sought a Congress ticket and resigned from the STC after the defeat of Indira Gandhi His passport was impounded, he is under a cloud of suspicion and the Central Bureau of Investigations is raking up his activities His contemporary and chief of the MMTC, C R Das' services have

[5]*Current*, 18 June 1977.

been terminated and he too is facing an inquiry These two freebooters indulged in unparalleled plunder of the country's resources at the behest of the Congress rulers The booty runs into Rs 500 crores and Mohan Dharia [Janata Party's Commerce Minister] is determined to dig up the wealth hidden in secret accounts inside the country and abroad

The mid-76 visit to Paris of Prof D P Chattopadhya, his Special Assistant N K Singh and MMTC Chairman C R Das is likely to be reviewed in the light of information that the real purpose of the visit was the safe-keeping of monies collected on such commissions

Was Indira Gandhi unaware of these alleged operations of her blue-eyed boys?

Chattopadhya was also trying all the time to ingratiate himself with the Young Master by acting as his political go-between One of Sanjay Gandhi's first political targets after the Emergency was Priyaranjan Das Munshi, a young MP and President of the Indian Youth Congress By mid-September 1975, Munshi's friends in the party and the administration had warned him that his life was in danger and that he should make himself scarce in Delhi, or better still leave the city altogether In early November, Debi Prasad Chattopadhya, acting on the "command" of R K Dhawan, informed Munshi that the Prime Minister did not want him to remain Youth Congress President and he should therefore submit his resignation

Munshi made frantic efforts to meet the Prime Minister but every time he was told that she had "no time" Eventually he decided to meet Sanjay Gandhi who told him brashly "You are against me and my mother You will have to quit"

While he was mounting his political operations through his scheming cronies and arm twisting hoodlums, Sanjay Gandhi was not neglecting the money world He had nursed a long-standing grievance against the country's banking system which had put all kinds of obstacles in his march towards becoming an industrial tycoon *To set the Indian banking right, he chose a* "good boy" from West Bengal, Pranab Kumar Mukherjee He had shown himself to be a loyal "worshipper" of Indira Gandhi, and with Sanjay Gandhi himself as his lobbyist at No 1 Safdarjang

Road there was little surprise that he shot up in the eyes of Indira Gandhi At the Kamagatamaru Congress session in Chandigarh, she made it a special point to mention his name repeatedly in her speeches and on one occasion the entire police and civil administration of the city seemed to be searching for Pranab Kumar Mukherjee whom the Prime Minister ' wanted on the dais to make a special announcement in person "

Sanjay Gandhi had persuaded his mother to give Mukherjee independent charge of Banking and Revenue, over the head of C Subramaniam, Finance Minister, who had been proving a difficult man As one banker put it, by the end of 1975, both the "external and internal finances of the country passed into the hands of non professionals beginning with Pranab Mukherjee "

With Mukherjee acting as the front, Sanjay Gandhi started hiring and firing Chairmen of banks One day the General Manager of a nationalized bank was given a telephone number and told to ring up and seek an appointment He had no idea whose number it was, nor the purpose of his meeting whoever it was When he dialled the number, he found he was talking to R K Dhawan, Additional Private Secretary to Indira Gandhi Having got the appointment, he turned up at No 1 Safdarjang Road where he was "interviewed" by Sanjay Gandhi and told that he had been "passed" for the post of Chairman of a Bombay based nationalized bank He soon got his appointment letter

To push out the Chairman of the State Bank of India, Talwar, the government got a special law hurriedly enacted to enable it to dismiss any bank Chairman by giving him three months' notice Talwar's fault was that he had refused to lend four crores of rupees to a cement company owned by a henchman of Sanjay Gandhi

In Talwar's place came the all too obliging Varadachari who went around the resettlement colonies of Delhi with Sanjay Gandhi, promising loans to anybody who wanted it He of course promptly sanctioned the four crores needed by Sanjay's crony

The nationalized banks had become the hunting ground for all kinds of operators claiming to be friends of the Prime Minister's household And if they ever had any trouble, Pranab Mukherjee was always ready to use his authority on their behalf One firm which had connections with Sanjay Gandhi had run a "bad account" with the consortium of a nationalized bank and two

foreign banks of about Rs 85 lakhs The firm wanted more loans from a bank with which it had a "doubtful account" When this was refused, Pranab Mukherjee was approached and the bank Chairman had a hard time explaining to the Minister that it would be imprudent to advance the loan Prudence had become an expendable virtue for Indian banking

The Income Tax Department too was put to the fullest use It was packed with corrupt men and placed under the overall charge of a great khidmatgar of No 1 Safdarjang Road, S R Mehta, who immediately launched on a series of "selective" raids in the name of checking tax evasion Apart from penalizing the recal citrant business houses, the raids helped keep the pipelines to the powers-that-be flowing Mehta had rightly been awarded a Padma Bhusan!

The kowtowing satraps of Indira Gandhi were not only projecting her son as the "future hope of India" but also helping fill up his coffers A charge-sheet submitted to the Acting President B D Jatti and Prime Minister Morarji Desai said that the Uttar Pradesh government had placed orders with the Maruti Ltd for *building 450 bus bodies without calling for any tender, that it had* bought secondhand bulldozers from Sanjay Gandhi and paid the price of new ones Besides, the Tewari government had paid Rs 5 lakhs to the Maruti Technical Services for drawing maps for an industrial development authority

Uttar Pradesh was one of the several states which had agreed to buy one or more American Piper planes for which Sanjay was the agent Many businessmen and industrialists, who had made a fortune out of their connections with the Indira Durbar, had also agreed to oblige this VIP agent Among them were K K Birla, Charanjit Singh of Coca Cola, Kapil Mohan of Mohan Breweries, Raunaq Singh of Bharat Steel Tubes, Kamal Nath of the Elec trical Manufacturing Company, and Sagar Suri of Automobile Products of India As a correspondent wrote in the *Washington Post*, Sanjay had become both the power behind his mother's throne and a merchant doing business from a stall in front of it! Sanjay, commented a West European diplomat, was "supposed to be asking for one per cent commission *It's quite modest, really*"

"Details of Sanjay Gandhi's agency activities," John Saar wrote, "were specifically denied only by the commercial attache of a European country whose principal aircraft manufacturer is

seeking to sell a combat plane to the Indian Government 'I hope you will not print this dirty, ugly history about India,' he said Diplomats who confirmed the relationship took a pragmatic view, stressing that since the younger Gandhi holds no official government post, nothing illegal is involved "[6]

The younger Gandhi held no post, and yet it was no secret that he had virtually become many ministers rolled in one, that he was making appointments for high government positions, issuing frequent commands to cabinet ministers and senior officials, bulldozing thousands of homes, snuffing out people who dared to come in his way He was doing all this while making pots of money on the side[1]

Much before the Emergency, a swarm of riff raffs and scums had joined the circle around the Young Master Mean, contemptible people who suddenly found a prop against which they could grow Scurvy hoodlums, vile gutter-snipes, pimps and procurers, perverts and drug addicts were all the same to the mother and the son if they served their purposes

Clowns and buffoons were perfectly in order You needed them in any court The cruder the better Some of the men who flocked to the charmed circle were old wheeler-dealers who had already made a fortune There was after all no great break from the past, "Cadillac pimps" had surfaced long back It was only that now they really came into their own But there were some others who suddenly rose from the gutters and stalked into the coorridors of power

Arjan Das Ahuja ran a puncture repair shop in Lakshmibai Nagar in South Delhi An uncouth, unlettered refugee One day a car puncture took Rajiv Gandhi to the shop and the two of them seem to have struck an immediate rapport Perhaps it was the man's appearance and manner of speaking which attracted Rajiv He was a short, stout man, something of a *pahelwan*, clownish to the limit His language was uncouth and vulgar, but he seemed to know such a lot of interesting tidbits about the underworlds of the city, a man who could take you for a ride any time! Rajiv one day introduced Sanjay Gandhi to his new discovery and he hit it off even better with the man Whether Sanjay was on the

[6] *Washington Post*, 10 November 1976

foreign banks of about Rs 85 lakhs The firm wanted more loans from a bank with which it had a "doubtful account" When this was refused, Pranab Mukherjee was approached and the bank Chairman had a hard time explaining to the Minister that it would be imprudent to advance the loan Prudence had become an expendable virtue for Indian banking

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[4] *Washington Post*, 10 November 1976

same wave length with Rukhsana Sultana or not, he was certainly so with Arjan Das They proved so complementary to each other that they became bosom pals Those were the days when Sanjay Gandhi had just returned from England, wilder than ever There is no knowing the number of scrapes he got into, but almost always his new friend Arjan Das was of great help in bailing him out without many people knowing about the doings of the VIP baby Arjan Das soon became a regular visitor to No 1 Safdarjang Road

What made him a special attraction to Sanjay Gandhi was that he seemed to know all the little workshops and junkyards of the city, plus all the Chor Bazars" (markets of thieves) where he could get different little bits and pieces stolen from different cars and two wheelers to help him cannibalize his own dream car It was his great chum Arjan who took Sanjay Gandhi to Gulabi Bagh and introduced him to the denizens of the city's biggest junkyard They were all mightly pleased to have a smooth looking young man who happened to be the son of the Prime Minister and yet talked their own lingo With Arjan Das as his friend philosopher, and guide, Sanjay Gandhi took his first big step towards becoming an automobile tycoon The real creator of the hybrid "Maruti" was in fact the clownish puncture repairer of Lakshmibai Nagar

The confidant of the sons in due course became quite a favourite of the mother There was no harm having admirers and promoters at different levels She after all drew her strength from the common masses, or so she thought till the last In any case a friend of her sons was always welcome, and the man s physique gave her some confidence about the safety of her sons, specially the younger one whose wildness had always been a headache for her Arjan Das was a good bodyguard, and she would often ask him to accompany Sanjay on his outings

"*Main Indira Gandhi ka teesra beta hun*" (I am the third son of Indira Gandhi), Arjan Das was soon boasting to his friends and relatives People always saw him going round with the two Gandhis, walking in and out of No 1 Safdarjang Road as though he lived there His stock went up in his own circles, and officers and police men even began bowing to him In the elections of 1971, when Sanjay Gandhi went out campaigning for the first time, Arjan Das was almost always beside him, his guardian angel

For all his great *khidmatgari* to Sanjay and the family, Arjan Das was rewarded with membership of the Delhi Metropolitan Council The man became important, began throwing his weight about He allegedly started collecting from shopkeepers what he described as "protection money" and if some people refused to oblige they were arrested by the police Arjan's tentacles were growing wider He was becoming a centre of power in the Delhi Administration In the year preceding the Emergency, about a thousand "selective" raids were conducted on shops at the direction of Arjan Das The raids hardly ever brought out anything except an extra quintal of foodgrains here and there, but they are said to have proved very "lucrative ' for the man behind them

Apart from these activities, he was making full use of his contacts with the court He became a great influence pedlar One of the many people he helped get on in life, always through the back door, was B R Tamta Under the Jan Sangh administration, Tamta had been under a cloud There had been various charges against him and he had been rejected for the post of a deputy municipal commissioner Even so, he had later manipulated to become a deputy commissioner in charge of water sewage But Tamta was a man with high ambitions and wanted to climb up fast, no matter how He had a friend in the Metropolitan Council who suggested that he should meet Arjan Das He was the man who could send him sky high if he wanted "I know him very well, I ll take you to him," said the Councillor And so he took Tamta to Arjan Das and told him "He is just the man who deserves to be the Municipal Commissioner, and you are the man who can do it " Arjan Das, who could readily recognize his own type, saw how sensible the suggestion was There couldn't be a better way of consolidating his position in the Metropolitan Council than to plant his own man as the Commissioner Arjan Das took Tamta to Sanjay Gandhi Within months Tamta got an out of turn promotion and soon showed how well he deserved the confidence of Arjan Das and Sanjay Gandhi Their words were his gospel

No 1 Safdarjang Road looked a strange sight when Subhadra Joshi reached there on the evening of 12 June 1975 It was not the strange silence created by the traumatic developments of the day

which upset her, but the strange faces hovering around the place She had never seen them before Subhadra Joshi had been closely associated with Indira Gandhi for nearly three decades, and as a Congress MP she was one of the first to have reiterated her faith in Indira Gandhi's leadership after the upsetting judgment of the Allahabad High Court

As she entered the house, she wondered who all these people were Some young men sat in little groups on the lawns and as she discovered later they were mostly workers from Maruti factory Some posters and sticking paste were being loaded in a fleet of Ambassador cars

She asked somebody what was happening and was told that these were all arrangements for putting up posters in the city in support of Indira Gandhi

"But who has asked you to do all this?" Subhadra Joshi asked[7]

"Sanjayji," said one of the young enthusiasts "Sanjayji is looking after all this "

Subhadra Joshi rang up Sanjay Gandhi from No 1 Akbar Road, the house adjacent to Indira Gandhi's residence which formed part of the PM's residential complex She asked him why all the publicity was being organized from the PM's house

"What difference does it make?" asked Sanjay

"Well, it doesn't look nice that all this should be done from this house What will people say? It's better if the solidarity activity is mobilized from some other place "

"O, I see," said Sanjay Gandhi Obviously such niceties had not occurred to him "We'll not do it again," he said

Just as Subhadra Joshi had hung up the phone, a stout dwarfish man walked up to her and said very proudly, "*Bahenji*, I am doing all this " The man was Arjan Das This was the first time that she had seen the man "Well you better stop it now," she told him sternly

Next day she was told that it had been decided to stop all the city buses and cut off all the water and power supply "But why?" she asked her informer, startled by the news She was told that this was to show the solidarity of the workers in favour of Indira Gandhi continuing as the Prime Minister, as also to express anger against the judge who had unseated her

[7]*As narrated by Subhadra Joshi to the author*

"That's all right, but why do all this? Why paralyze the city life? Who has ordered all this?"

She was told that the Lieutenant Governor and "others" had taken the decision Subhadra Joshi rang up Kishan Chand to find out if there really was such a silly move He said yes, it was true, and the only way to stop it was to get a different order from the Prime Minister's house

Early next morning, she heard that a Sanjay crony was trying to force people out of mills and factories to go for a "solidarity rally" to No 1 Safdarjang Road Again she rang up the Lieutenant Governor and requested him to stop people from doing all this

In a very weak and shaken voice, Kishan Chand told her "Madam, I'll try to check it But if you want to do something about the water and power connections, you should immediately rush to the Prime Minister's house"

She rushed to No 1 and told Indira Gandhi what she had heard She had thought the Prime Minister would be shocked to hear these orders, but instead, she said irritatedly "*Koi Kuchch karta to hai nahin Yahan se karte hain to log etraz karte hain, chale aate hain pious advice dene*" (people do nothing and when we ourselves do something from here they come to oppose and give us pious advice)

Subhadra Joshi was taken aback This was a very different Indira Gandhi to the one she used to know

"But this won't be right," Mrs Joshi said "Life in the city will be paralyzed"

"I know, but whatever happens in Delhi gets a lot of international publicity," Indira Gandhi said

Mrs Joshi was all the more shocked She was doing it for international publicity!

"But the people will abuse us," she argued "For heaven's sake withdraw the order Tell the Lieutenant Governor"

Indira Gandhi got up and started pacing the room up and down She withdrew the order, but she had revealed an ugly face

On the roads outside, day after day, crowds shouted their "solidarity" with her, crowds hired and commandeered by B R Tamta, Arjan Das, and V S Ailawadi, Member Secretary of the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, who had also enlisted himself as a khidmatgar of the Sanjay caucus

Having established itself in the court, the caucus started extending its tentacles The Delhi Administration, the Metropolitan Council, and the New Delhi Municipal Corporation were already in its clutches But without grabbing the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), its hold on the city would not to be complete

Technically, the Lieutenant Governor was the ex-officio Chairman of the DDA, but the operative man in control was Vice-Chairman Jagmohan An extremely ambitious careerist, Jagmohan had a passion for the job he was doing He had worked hard to go up in life and was extremely conscious of his abilities and good looks, even at 50 He had begun his career in the Punjab State Civil Service and had been promoted to the Indian Administrative Service When he joined the DDA as the Housing Commissioner he resigned from the IAS, and instead of remaining just an administrator he plunged himself into the intricacies of urban development and planning His hard work and sincerity impressed the then Lieutenant Governor A N Jha so much that he got him appointed Vice Chairman of the DDA From then until the changes of 1974-75, the organization virtually remained a one-man show Jagmohan spent hours every day in libraries studying various facets of urban development and acquired what some people considered "a surprising level of technical know-how for a civil servant " He also had the qualities of a showman, which helped project his image as a "great builder" and gradually he came to fancy himself going down in history as a second Lutyens

His troubles started when Navin Chawla became the virtual Lieutenant Governor Chawla expected the same kind of subservience from Jagmohan as he got from most other high officials in Delhi But Jagmohan himself was too conscious of his position and ability to kowtow to Chawla, much junior to him in seniority and age And since he knew that Kishan Chand was a mere pawn in the hands of Chawla, he often sat over requests which came even in the name of the Lieutenant Governor

Jagmohan was away in Australia when Chawla got his "coffin all prepared," as one DDA man put it. But one of his well-wishers in the DDA got scent of the plans for his ouster and sent him a cable to return as fast as he could Jagmohan hurried back and the next thing people knew after some days was that the Vice Chairman was "firmly established" in his post. Everybody was aware of Jagmohan's great "manoeuvrability" but they could not quite

figure out what magic wand he had used to put both Chawla and Kishan Chand in their places All that transpired later was that through one of his friends Jagmohan had established a line with Sanjay Gandhi

The fatal flaw in Jagmohan's character, said people who know him closely, was his over-weening ambition and his complete identification with his post "He could not imagine himself being eased out of the job, it had become a part of him," said one of his colleagues He had preferred to surrender himself to Sanjay Gandhi than to go out of the DDA

And once he had surrendered, he was just swept in the tide No matter how much he tried to give an academic cover and rationale for the "Operation Demolition" the crudeness and barbarity of it all stuck out a mile.

Soon after the Sanjay bulldozers (the DDA had allegedly bought six of them from Maruti Ltd without calling for any tenders) went into action, Subhadra Joshi tried to persuade the officers of the DDA and the Delhi Municipal Corporation to work in the "spirit of rehabilitation" but nobody seemed in a mood to listen to her One day she went to the Municipal Commissioner, Tamta, and asked him "Where are you sending all these people Please tell me, so that I can go and see the place "

Tamta said "*Behenji*, why do you involve yourself in these things? It will be better if you go out of Delhi That will be in your interest "

"How can I go away? ' she said "We have to see what is happening "

"Well, we have to beautify the city," Tamta said pompously, "and there is no other way to do it "

"But you must know where they are being sent, where they will live . "

"I can't give them place," shouted Tamta "The DDA would not give them any place unless we first throw them out. . "

And so the operations continued Subhadra Joshi rushed to the Prime Minister and told her that the officers were running amuck (She soon knew, but did not tell her then, for good reasons, that in fact it was her son [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Governor Sanjay Gandhi too attended the meeting, and as it

turned out, the whole thing became an exercise in flattery "What a great job Sanjay Gandhi is doing" was the refrain of most speakers Subhadra Joshi could see that she was becoming a *persona non grata*

One day Subhadra Joshi was told that they were going to demolish the shops round Jama Masjid Next morning she went around to the officers in a delegation, but they assured her there was no such plan And yet the bulldozers came and mowed them down

The worst of it all was yet to come Sanjay Gandhi, going round the city on an "inspection tour" with Jagmohan and other DDA officials, had one day stopped at the Turkman Gate He took a long hard look at the human tenements and commanded "I want to see the Jama Masjid from the Turkman Gate" The DDA took it up as their refrain They decided it could only be done by a blitzkrieg

And a blitzkrieg it was The wails and shrieks of falling men, women and children rose over the bang of bullets, then got drowned in the roar of bulldozers The number of people killed, whether 24 or 80, tell you nothing of the horror of it all, the rape and the plunder and the bestiality of men Turkman Gate epitomized Sanjay the man

On 27 April 1976, Subhadra Joshi wrote to Indira Gandhi " . many things have happened Either you do not have time or you do not want to know what is happening Strange! I hear it is the turn of Serai Khalil tomorrow The hope that you will set things right has started fading Still it is my duty to make the request Also, it is natural human tendency to cling to hope Hence the letter I have written too much High-placed people hear only high pitched voices"

Indira Gandhi sent the letter to the Congress President, perhaps to reprimand the MP who had crossed her limits!

Some days after the Turkman Gate incident, Sheikh Abdullah visited Delhi He had heard numerous stories about the way people had been killed and women dishonoured He wanted to go and see the residents of the area who had been taken to a trans-Yamuna area called Trilokpuri Mohammad Yunus accompanied Abdullah to Trilokpuri, where the tearful men and women narrated their gruesome experiences When he was about to return he said he would like to go to the Turkman Gate and see the site of the

ran into a stout hurdle a Sanjay crony He had his house there But it struck this clever man that he would stand to gain if it was demolished He could ask the DDA to give him a flat, instead of the usual 25-yard plot given for resettlement That shouldn't be much of a problem with Jagmohan as the Vice Chairman, always ready to oblige anybody close to Sanjay Gandhi And then it occurred to him that he could get more than one flat, for they were six brothers But there was a snag All the six were living in the same little house and were members of the same family According to the rules he could not get more than one flat, he was told

The man racked his brain and thought of a new strategem He had a neighbour who was a retired engineer His house too was going to be demolished He approached the neighbour and told him he could get him a middle income group flat from the DDA if he would do him a favour Attracted by the offer, the engineer asked him what he would have to do "Nothing much," said the man "You have only to show that my brothers have been your tenants, all paying you rents separately" That's easy, said the man, and agreed to give him rent receipts, if required

But there was yet another irritating snag The brothers had to have separate ration cards in order to show that they were living independently The same night, this ingenious man summoned a Rationing Inspector to his house and got separate ration cards made out for each of his brothers, showing them as "head of family" All this was backdated and to make the whole thing even more fool-proof, the ration shopkeeper was called and asked to make out backdated cash memos for wheat and sugar supposedly bought from his shop The records were now in order, not that he would have needed all this with Sanjay Gandhi at his back Still, you never know, he thought Soon afterwards, people learnt that the man had got six of the choicest middle-income group flats in a DDA colony, for himself and his brothers

While Sanjay Gandhi was "conquering" the country, his great chum, Arjan Das had become a power to reckon with His filthy little puncture-repair shop at Lakshmibai Nagar began to be visited by some of the top brass of Delhi B R Tamta, Jagmohan, and many others would sit and chat at the "VIP shop" for hours on end Businessmen flocked to the place seeking all sorts of favours

Anybody who had anything to get done in the Delhi Administration or the Delhi Municipality or the NDMC or the DDA would just go straight to Arjan Das Some of his friends started calling the shop "the mini South Block" and his home "the mini Prime Minister's house"

The man had prospered in life. To entertain his Young Master and other VIP friends, he had organized a number of "joints" in the city, including one in Chanakyapuri which had a Youth Congress signboard as a convenient cover The neighbourhood is still full of stories about the gala parties and the high jinks that went on at this so-called Youth Congress office during those glorious 19 months

This "third son of Indira Gandhi" would often take all sorts of people for the *darshan of Mataji* and almost always these were lucrative trips With the Emergency came his real bonanza. Arjan Das was the man behind most of the 20-point hoardings that suddenly burst like rashes on the city's face When it later became a 25 point programme, all the hoardings were pulled down and new ones put up with the mother and the son beaming down on their dumb captive flock But the biggest money-spinners were the *dangals* (wrestling matches) that the man organized Police officers, sales tax and revenue personnel were driven hard for weeks on end to sell tickets for the free-style wrestling shows

One Superintendent of Police refused to obey the orders of Arjan Das There was an altercation between them and the man threatened the SP "I will see that you are sacked." Shortly afterwards, the then DIG, Range, was summoned to No 1, where Sanjay Gandhi ordered him to dismiss the SP forthwith. The DIG tried to reason with him, and said they would have to follow a certain procedure for taking such an action. He was cut short, the prince had no patience for rules and procedures "You may go," he said in anger

A few days later there was a "full-scale conference" at No 1 on the issue, with the Chief Executive Councillor, the DIG, and other officials of the Delhi Administration. The Prime Minister herself presided The meeting went on for full 45 minutes at the end of which it was decided that the SP must at least be transferred, as a punishment.

It was when this favourite of the house had landed the government into a diplomatic hassle that Indira Gandhi decided

to show her displeasure towards him In preparation for a family planning rally addressed by Sanjay Gandhi, some retainers of Arjan Das went to the Hauz Khas area in South Delhi to put up posters When they started sticking the posters on the gates of an African High Commission situated there, they were driven out A week later the High Commissioner was returning to his house with a friend from a party when his car was attacked by a goon squad The car was smashed and the High Commissioner himself got a few blows The driver had identified some of the young men to be the same who had been driven out of the High Commission The High Commissioner drove straight to No 1 Safdarjang Road and complained to Indira Gandhi Next morning she ordered the arrest of the hoodlums For some months Arjan Das and his goons were kept away from the house

Among the social flotsam washed up with Sanjay Gandhi were a host of get rich-quick men automobile distributors, soft drink bottlers, shady industrialists, wine merchants, and brewery owners Some became directors of the Maruti Ltd , some contact men for netting dealers for non existent cars, some provided the Young Master with plush apartments for his nocturnal flings, and some were just his procurers and suppliers

During his Gulabi Bagh days, Sanjay's car was often seen zooming through the Delhi University campus The backs of the Miranda House, a fashionable women's college, were the favourite haunts of a group of hoodlums led by the hero from No 1 Safdarjang Road The "white car scandal' is still talked about on the campus At dead of night a girl had been kidnapped from the college hostel amidst a hail of bullets to frighten the inmates The white car had belonged to Kuldip Narang, a businessman connected with the Gandhi family (his wife is a cousin of Indira Gandhi)

A smooth, articulate man, Kuldip Narang had strong connections with an officer in the US Embassy in New Delhi Almost every other evening, Narang would meet the official and then go on to the Prime Minister's house to meet Sanjay Gandhi He was allegedly passing on to Sanjay various ideas and ' blueprints" for an effective clamp down

One dear chum of Sanjay Gandhi was 30-year-old Kamal Nath, a Punjabi businessman of Calcutta, who had shared a room and many a delinquent experience with him at Doon School Soon after the Emergency, Kamal Nath suddenly shot into fame

as Sanjay's "plenipotentiary in West Bengal " His main "assignment" was to sell the Sanjay image to the people of West Bengal, organize storm troopers, and weed out anybody who was not loyal to the Young Master Whenever there was any hurdle in his way, Kamal Nath rushed to his friend in Delhi Sanjay Gandhi summoned Om Mehta and told him to ensure that the West Bengal administration "behaves " Om Mehta summoned the West Bengal Inspector General of Police and other senior officers to Delhi and instructed them to obey the orders of Kamal Nath Soon the bumptious young businessman became the real power centre for the whole of Eastern India People queued up at his Robinson Street residence in Calcutta for "interviews " Ministers and partymen vied with one another to court the young man who could lead them straight to the sanctum sanctorum Kamal Nath began taking groups of West Bengal ministers and politicians to Delhi for *special audiences with Sanjay Gandhi, and sometimes* with the Prime Minister

Kamal Nath's influence extended far and wide Even Central Ministers obeyed his orders One of them was V C Shukla who himself admitted before the Congress Working Committee that the government had cancelled advertisements to a Calcutta newspaper at the behest of Kamal Nath Shukla told the committee that Kamal Nath had gone to see him accompanied by the West Bengal Minister of State for Information, Subrata Mukherjee, and had demanded the cancellation of all advertisement to the newspaper Shukla took the orders of Kamal Nath as "instructions from top quarters " It must have been a hard decision for Shukla, because the order against the newspaper was clearly a move against Siddhartha Shankar Ray, one of his mentors But Kamal Nath's orders were far more important, and Ray should have appreciated his predicament But instead, he rubbed Shukla at the Congress Working Committee meeting in April 1977, forgetting all the dirty jobs that the man had done for him in respect of other newspapers and journalists of Calcutta

Ray, who had been one of the greatest khidmatgars of Indira Gandhi, had been humiliated so badly by Sanjay Gandhi that he had no option but to take an anti Sanjay stance That was also a good way of building up an image, the clever Chief Minister must have thought. But he never quite closed the doors for a possible rapprochement with Sanjay Gandhi Nor did he ever take an

anti Sanjay stand openly He did not have the guts to do that In fact, at one point, when his authority was getting fast eroded, he tried hard to propitiate Kamal Nath He made it a point to go even to the businessman's dog show, where he engaged himself in small-talk and inanities, taking even little digs from Kamal Nath with smiles

That is what the great leaders of the Congress Party had been reduced to hollow, gutless men All posing as though they were fighting for great principles Though humiliated almost every day, even by his own ministers, Ray had clung to his seat of power He stomached even the disgrace of being forced to relinquish the portfolio of Home (police) whose retention he had made a "prestige issue" And yet some people thought he was a man of great self-respect! Just because he had not gone to the airport to receive Sanjay Gandhi as other Chief Ministers had done It was no more than a little show of bravado, for public image!

Essentially, Ray was not very different from, say, Narayan Dutt Tewari or Zail Singh During his first 666 days in office, he had spent 306 days in Delhi, mostly in Indira Gandhi's waiting room As great a courtier as all the rest you have seen Only, he failed to see, like many others, that the mother and the son were the same

9

The Curtain

Jawaharlal Nehru is quoted as having once told his daughter "All of us are various mixtures of the good and the great and the little, and the quest for overmuch power is a dangerous one Sooner or later downfall and ruin come to individuals or nations who seek it "[1]

In these two sentences lies the epitaph of the Indira era

With all his failings, Nehru had a sense of history He had seen great dictators, once hailed as infallible, being dumped into the dustbin of history If he hadn't taken any lessons from them, if he did not have that strong streak of liberal humanism in him he himself might well have turned into a tinpot dictator

But Indira Gandhi had little to do with history Nehru's famous letters to his daughter could not have been more wasted than they were on her As she herself said, more with pride than humility, she was made of a "different stuff" than her father And her darling Sanjay was in most ways an even sharper break from Nehru Snobbishly, he said he could remember no way in which his grandfather had left any impression on him There was certainly nothing of Nehru's refinement and culture in Sanjay Gandhi Much as Nehru loved the boy, his activities had been one of the despairs of his last years of life.

For several years after the rot in the party and the government

[1] Marie Seton, *Pandit ji—A Portrait of Jawaharlal Nehru*

had become oppressive, there were numerous people in the country who still anchored their hopes on Indira Gandhi In the Congress itself, there were some good and clean people who felt suffocated by the sharp erosion of values all around—the corruption, the blatant horse trading for power, the steady rise of political criminals But these people kept on hoping that with Indira Gandhi at the top, the good and the clean would eventually come into their own It was only the unscrupulous political operators who were spreading the poison, she herself was clean and would some day come down with a heavy hand on all the crooks around her But time would pass by and men like Bansi Lal, Lalit Narayan Mishra, Yashpal Kapoor, and all the rest of them would just keep going up and up Why isn't she doing something about them? they would wonder And sometimes, when their hopes would start flagging, they would go to Indira Gandhi to speak their minds to her, to find out if she was aware of what was happening all around

Most of them would come back satisfied that she herself was not to blame She would listen to them, sometimes even make notes of what they told her, which made them think that she might act on their advice or suggestions "No, her own political instincts are right, she has the good of the country at heart," they would come and tell their colleagues "It's only the crooks who are doing all this, but wait and see, she will set things right" Even hard-boiled commentators and people supposed to have keen insight into men and matters were taken in by her show of sincerity and good sense

Some people went on hoping even during the worst days of the Emergency "It's only the boy who is the evil force there, she is different," they would often say in private, perhaps more to reassure themselves Even now, many continue to believe in her "essential goodness" which is another proof of her remarkable capacity for simulation

Jekyll and Hyde had only two faces, Indira Gandhi had many All her men were her different masks which she wore as and when it suited her It was the will of Indira Gandhi and later of the mother and the son which operated through the crude bunch of men

Even a surface attempt, as this book, to unravel the psychologies of the people around Indira Gandhi and her son, lays bare virtually

the whole range of human inadequacies and frailties At best, these were small men Not one of them had the qualities even of a mediocre politician Bansi Lal, V C Shukla, Barooah, Om Mehta, Yunus, S S Ray, D P Chattopadhya, Pranab Mukherjee, not to speak of men like Yashpal and Dhawan, were all back-room boys whom the two used for their unbridled pursuit of power, devoid of all values These were the men who rose to the country's top positions and debased them all So much mediocrity, so much grossness and insignificance of character would have been hard to find even in the minor courts of the Italian Renaissance

One of their dearest ones was a man who had been a disgrace even for the bus conductors of Hissar They made him their Defence Minister All the chicanery, corruption, and vulgarity of the now defunct court of Loharu Nawabs were carried over by this man to the court of the mother and the son These were the qualities they prized most It mattered nothing to Indira Gandhi if her *Raksha Mantri* was as vulgar and crude with Army Generals as he had been with the bus conductors of Bhiwani or Loharu

Having established his Nawabdom in Haryana with the blessings of the ruling deity of India, Bansi Lal had taken over from his friend, Lalit Narayan Mishra, the task of promoting the heir apparent That was the sure road to success that he had chosen Right from the job of finding land for the boy's car factory down to the supply of bricks and cement and steel, Bansi Lal took everything upon himself He was the one to goad the mother and the son to pack all the trouble makers in jail and seize absolute power "Power never comes on a platter, you have to grab it," he always told Sanjay Gandhi

When he was brought in as the Defence Minister, he allegedly smoothed the way for huge defence contracts to Maruti Ltd in collaboration with multinationals, if only the March elections hadn't spoilt it all, the giant machines would have arrived at the factory He spun around politicking in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana in Indian Air Force helicopters as though they were his personal property He did not consider the Indian Air Force planes comfortable enough for himself and his masters and so he was about to go in for a luxury Boeing, which would also have given his Young Master quite a tidy sum on the side One of his last orders as the Defence Minister was for 500 pistols from ordnance disposal for use during the elections by his goon squad in Haryana He

could not get them because a Deputy Secretary gave an adverse note which delayed the matter, and by the time Bansi Lal knew of it, he was out If he had come back victorious, that would have been the end of the "foolhardy" officer

All the deeds of this man were known to Indira Gandhi. But if he had done five dirty jobs for himself, he had done two for her. She had no face to haul him up, even if she had wanted to

Vastly different were the background and antecedents of Indira's Goebbels Even if he hadn't come into politics, he would still have been a playboy, thanks to the wealth his father had left him. Shukla loved fast driving and fast living and operated somewhat on the scale of a Harold Robbins character, flitting from hotel to hotel, affair to affair, talking big, living big

There was not much inside him He was just a swashbuckler, which was considered the greatest recommendation for the job he was assigned He could be rough and tough with editors and correspondents and that was what the court wanted, a man who could tighten the screws on the incorrigible chaps of the Press

The man knew nothing about the media when he entered Shastri Bhawan and knew nothing about them when he walked out of the building for the last time, 19 months later He didn't have to know anything The less he knew the better he could screw the media He set for himself three tasks to brighten and magnify the personalities of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay, highlight the "gains" of the Emergency, and to banish any truth that came in the way of the first two He went about the job in such a crude and hamhanded manner that he ended up by totally screwing up the credibility of the media—and of his masters

Dev Kant Barooah, who had come in to give a "new lustre" to the Congress Party, only succeeded in pushing it further on the disaster course With his fire-breathing statements, pleasing to his commie friends, he aggravated the crisis in the country and deepened the fissures in his own party An ambitious man who had his eyes set on the highest job in the country, he bided his time playing the court jester But this simulated character ran away with him at times and he became a buffoon pure and simple In his sycophancy towards the mother and the son, he showed himself to be an even greater nincompoop than his predecessor. At the Youth Congress session in Delhi in August 1976, Barooah told the Sanjay hoodlums "Break open the doors of the Congress

and occupy the chairs " Said the headlines in a widely circulated journal "Congress is Dead, Long live the Youth Congress" If it was not dead, it had certainly abdicated

After the great Congress debacle, he talked volubly to his friends about the "Borstal character" of the boy, but he could hardly explain his own actions When Sanjay Gandhi sent in his resignation from the AICC membership, Barooah promptly sent his acceptance, saying, "I appreciate this thoughtful action of yours in view of your wish to retire from political life " But who had made Sanjay Gandhi a member of the AICC when he was not even a primary member of the Congress? When the question of action against Sanjay Gandhi was raised in the Congress Working Committee later, that faithful lady khidmatgar of Indira Gandhi, Purabi Mukherjee, said blandly that the question did not arise because Sanjay Gandhi was not even a primary member of the party! What a Bumbledom Indira Gandhi had created around her!

There was her dear "Omji"—the dumb faced Kashmiri who took his orders every hour of the day and night from Sanjay Gandhi and R K Dhawan, mostly from the latter This loose-limbed man from Kistwar sometimes gave the appearance of being such an innocent man that you wouldn't think he could kill a fly It was certainly hard to believe that this man could become the instrument of widespread barbarity in the country "But I had nothing to do with law and order," he mumbled in the aftermath of the debacle He knew nothing at all! And yet when a day before resigning from the Congress, Jagjivan Ram asked Indira Gandhi that she should withdraw the Emergency, she said she was referring the matter to "Omji" Because Om Mehta was her "mask" for doing all the dirty jobs of the Emergency

And then her blustering Special Envoy who behaved more like a police officer of some tyrannical medieval court Such gems flowed from him every time he had a group of pressmen around him! At the Madras Press Club, talking about the Emergency and the political prisoners, Yunus gave some glimpses into the very special working of the Special Envoy's mind "I talked to the Shah of Iran recently about what he did with prisoners, and the reply was, 'We do not have prisoners We just shoot them' It is just these three, four countries [of the West] that are disease-

minded and refuse to see anything good in our country To hell with them! What about the British, wretched fellows, who hate Indians after we have worked for them? The lunatic British cannot forget the 400 year old story of Tipu Sultan or the Black Hole incident They have not forgiven it " Then perhaps Yunus suddenly remembered his communist baiting Young Master, and added "I don't read the Russian papers and I don't know what the hell is going on in the communist countries!" Probably what he wanted to emphasize was that like Sanjay Gandhi he was neither left nor right!

And then there was her "good boy" from West Bengal, Pranab Quite early during the Emergency, when the government was about to launch its operations against tax-evaders, Indira Gandhi called the young bespectacled minister for a briefing Always brief, Indira Gandhi is said to have told him the broad strategy for dealing with the tax-evaders They belonged to three categories these evaders Those of the first category were "friends" and the approach towards them was to "settle it" on a mutual basis Rajni Patel was still the leading fund collector of the party in those days, and so he was the man who would "know the friends " The second category comprised the "enemies " They had to be dealt with in the most ruthless manner and made to cough up the heaviest possible fines The third category was of "rich people " All that had to be done was to put the screw on them Again, Rajni Patel would know the men who belonged to this category Put the screw, and leave it to Rajni Patel to collect Poor Mukherjee, a lecturer in some god forsaken college until only some years ago, could never have imagined he would one day sit through such an enlightening discourse ! He was simply overawed by the aura that he had suddenly descended into As the Banking and Revenue Minister he could sit back in his swivel chair chewing a pipe and exult over the "huge empire" that he commanded! At such moments, of course, one never thought of the little humiliations of taking one's orders from a bully who was a nobody One could always reassure oneself with the fact that there was no difference between the young man and the Prime Minister *Some of these ministers felt honoured* to be of use even to "Dhawan Saheb "

These were the men who suited the style and temperament of Indira Gandhi She had had small men around her even earlier,

but there also happened to be some professional men to counteract the scums of her court One could perhaps describe P N Haksar as a Machiavelli of the office desk, but as long as he was there, he kept her image high

Such was the aura that was built around her over the years that many wondered how she could even tolerate the low and mean operators around herself One of the many possible explanations lay in her psychological make up Curiously enough the steep decline in her personality appears to have coincided with what some psychologists describe as the "climacterium"—the period of a great biological trauma for some women It s a dangerous age, they think In *The Psychology of Women*, Helen Deutsch describes some of the things that may happen to women during the climacterium

> Her rebellion against old age makes her forget all her experience Even if she has previously displayed good judgement of people, she now surrounds herself with men whose level is far inferior to her own, in order to have the illusion of being admired and loved by many Like a pubescent girl she now brags about her personality She makes friends with dubious individuals, whom she now attracts as light attracts a moth Her respectable acquaintances seem to her insignificant and boring The pull at the psychic umbilical cord and the yearning for the son grow more intense Their judgement fails, and they readily fall victim to evil counsellors

One of her many faces was beautiful to behold It charmed people Artists from far and wide came to sketch and paint her Film-makers waited for hours to capture one of her fleeting expressions they had seen somewhere, in real life or in some picture It was a face that many foreign journalists loved to describe her long, thin face and Roman features "I am somehow reminded of a Hapsburg empress," wrote one correspondent who interviewed her during her father's time ' When I see her slender sari draped figure sweeping through the carpeted halls of the Prime Minister's residence She enters the little sitting room so swiftly and noiselessly that I am always startled and slightly flustered ' [2]

[2] Welles Hangen, *After Nehru Who?*

Even in those early days, when she had no position and yet "vast, amorphous, and indefinable" powers[3] (as her son was to have during her prime ministership), there was an imperious aura about Indira Gandhi, and inside her a strong streak of fascism, as her husband noted very early She thought she had a divine right to rule, that there was something in her that was superior to all the others in the party The others were all "pygmies" or "idiots " There was perhaps a little of this in all Nehrus, a feeling that they were the inheritors of the White Man's Burden One of her close relatives B K Nehru, High Commissioner in London, once explained to Bernand D Nossiter, European Correspondent of the *Washington Post*, the Nehru family's view of those over whom they presided "Nehru, then Governor of Assam, was having trouble with the Mizos Sipping tea in the comfortable Governor's Palace, B K said 'You can't run a government along Gandhian lines I agree with Mao power comes out of the end of a gun There are times when you have to face things, kill and be killed We came along, moralists that we are, and said we must administer these savages ' "

Indira Gandhi showed very much the same attitude towards people who revolted against her When a latter day Gandhi marched out on the streets of Patna to raise a voice against her corrupt government, she sought to crush him and his movement with lathis and bullets Indeed, the real process of liberation from the British had been held up by the Nehrus If Jawaharlal was a nexus between the Hindu masses and the anglicized Hindu, as Nirad C Chaudhuri said,[4] Indira Gandhi was the nexus between the Nehru culture and the Sanjay boorishness

Indira Gandhi was no democrat, but she was all the time trying to project herself as one As her chance remark to a foreign journalist had shown ("what do you want me to do? I'm surrounded by a bunch of idiots And democracy ") she had little respect for democracy None the less she wanted to be extolled as a great democrat in the true Nehru tradition! A marked characteristic of her deeply splintered personality was her peculiar hang up about her image in the Western press She would not care less what others said about her, but a line of criticism in the

[3]*Ibid*
[4]Nirad C Chaudhuri *Continent of Circe*

British or the American press would throw her into hysterics She was always lashing at the Western press, to the point that it became an obsession with her What wouldn't she have given for a headline in the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* calling her the only democratic ruler east of Suez! There were many other reasons why she decided to go for elections when she did, but to prove the West wrong was certainly one of the principal reasons

She was arrogant about her power, but she was even more arrogant about the source of her power the 600 million people of India! Even when she had lost all touch with the people, she thought she had her hand on their pulses Nobody in the country knew the feelings of the people better than she did, she thought in her arrogance She was convinced that it was only a handful of city dwellers, deluded and misled by a worthless opposition, who were creating all the trouble Her para-military forces were sufficient to take care of them As for the vast teeming millions of the country she thought they were all her worshippers She had seen the big crowds at her public meetings, the rural folks looking up to her with awe and reverence But when the look in their eyes turned into stony indifference she did not even feel the change By then she had become such a paranoid, the large crowds and her speeches had become so mechanical that the change just did not register on her The form had become the reality, she did not even know the great effort that went into collecting crowds for her The number of heads was all she bothered about

Crowds had been a great obsession with Hitler too It is calculated that in the course of his life, the Fuhrer spoke before nearly 35 million people and he had always considered his big crowds an "expression of true democracy" Indira Gandhi may have drawn even more people during her "great decade" but that by itself could make her only as democratic as Hitler was

Behind all the populist rhetoric and the redeemer cult, systematically developed around the person of Indira Gandhi, there was the steady debasement of political values, a staggering increase in all round corruption, and a callous misuse of power and authority By 1974, corruption stories had started bursting like chain-crackers But instead of showing a genuine willingness to curb corruption, there was only greater impatience with all criticism As corruption was getting out of hand, so was her arrogance and woodenness Soon, even a whisper against her as V C Shukla

was to warn his officers, would become a "treason" and any unfavourable references to people connected with her "unpatriotic" That was not Shukla speaking, it was just another voice of the mother and the son

There was no difference between Indira Gandhi and Sanjay They were like the two sides of the same coin, equal partners in everything She could not trust anybody except her son, and perhaps not even him sometimes She must have heard about the parent-son intrigues of the Mughal court But certainly it was far better to make way for a son than for Barooah or Tripathi or Ray She and her darling son were out to fight the battle together "One thing he [Sanjay] inherits from me," she proclaimed, "is that when we are under attack, we fight back In fact, I think, he would never have come into politics if there had not been that tremendous attack on him in Parliament even before the Emergency, because basically he was not interested in any of these things But when there was an attack, he did feel nobody was speaking up for him This is what urged him to come out"

It was to enable her son to defend himself against attacks that Indira Gandhi entrusted all her powers to him! And later to defend her! "When the Allahabad High Court judgment came, I did feel that I needed help, that there were not very many sincere people around Therefore, he felt he should come and do what he could "

It was all done too crudely—the projection of Sanjay Gandhi—*the brazen use of official machinery on his image building trips* round the country, the shameless sycophancy of Indira's satraps, and his open interference in the day-to day affairs of the government and the Congress Party It became the talking point all over the country The brazenness of it all was making the whole operation counter productive, but Indira Gandhi hardly had the sensitivity to perceive it She herself was going all out to project her son, often asking her Ministers and Chief Ministers to "consult" Sanjay Gandhi on some point or the other "That's a programme Sanjay is interested in, you better talk to him," she would say Or if she herself didn't say it, there was always the great Sanjay-promoter, R K Dhawan, to drop the hint to the Union Ministers and Chief Ministers

It was perhaps no fault of Indira Gandhi It had happened to herself during her father's prime ministership Her projection by

indeed was the plan They had no idea at all of other people's plans, neither of Jagjivan Ram nor of the voters at large, who had for once made up their minds

If anybody was to be thanked for the decision to hold elections it was Sanjay Gandhi—and his mindless cronies like Narayan Dutt Tewari "Let the elections be held," he used to tell Sanjay Gandhi, "and you will see what a great victory we will have Not less than 80 seats in UP, I assure you, Sanjayji " He used to point towards the surging crowds of hired people and say "See, Sir, how the people have rushed for your *darshan* They have come from far-off villages, Sir "

His cronies from other states too were falling over one another to offer Sanjay Gandhi a "safe constituency " Long before there was any talk of elections, Jagannath Mishra had started pleading with Sanjay Gandhi to "grace Bihar" by agreeing to contest Lok Sabha elections from his late brother's constituency, Darbhanga "The people of Bihar would feel honoured," Mishra told him The even greater Sanjay crony, Sitaram Kesari, whom Lalit Narayan Mishra had thrust on the Bihar Congress, did not lag behind "You must contest from Bihar," he never tired of telling Sanjay Gandhi Devraj Urs, Gyani Zail Singh, and several others were also striving to have their own states "honoured "

To go for elections was not an easy decision for Indira Gandhi The life of the Lok Sabha had already been extended till 1978 March, but her schizophrenic mind never left her at peace No matter how hard she tried to put a cloak of legality on her position, she could never hide the illegality of it If her son was "extra-constitutional" she herself had become "unconstitutional " It hurt the *amour-propre* of this "democratic Empress" that some people did not appreciate her efforts to trim the Constitution to fit her size She was itching to show it to them that she still derived her powers from the masses of India She would show to the world that the 600 million people of the country who "worshipped" her would not tolerate the "treason" of a handful of opposition leaders whom her media had already painted as villainous Nazis and fascists

The Godmother must have been happy to see how well her son had come up, and how fast He was being extolled and adulated all over the country and most of her satraps had already accepted him as their "future leader " She had seen her boy on his trium-

phant tours on the half hour TV programmes, the motorcades, the processions, the huge public meetings She must have believed that he had made it You could not blame a doting mother if she had failed to see how dumb the boy looked to viewers round the country There had been mumbled complaints about the manner in which her son's programmes were being implemented, but she thought these critics were only jealous of Sanjay's great popularity "He is doing wonderful work," she told partymen who dropped oblique hints about the people's growing resentment The time had come, she thought, to formalize his position

But what delayed a decision was the nagging thought 'What if things went wrong?" She could not take the plunge until her spies and pundits gave the clearance

Indira Gandhi's intelligence networks were working overtime to assess the political atmosphere Trusted officers of the Intelligence Bureau and the RAW were spinning round the country But their reports were no longer going to her straight She had been sealed off by a wall

In early January 1977, Om Mehta informed Sanjay Gandhi that the latest intelligence reports indicated that it would not be "safe" to hold elections, specially in view of the tensions created by the implementation of the family planning programme Sanjay Gandhi flew into a temper and said 'Where are the reports? Show them to me "[6]

The faithful Om Mehta, who felt at home only in the world of commands, took the files to the prince, who scanned them with increasing anger "All rubbish," he is believed to have shouted "What do these people know? I have been going all over the country These reports are rubbish The Prime Minister will not like them " Sanjay Gandhi is said to have thrown the files so hard that the pages went flying A jittery Om Mehta picked up the pages, put them back in the file, and left

He called the intelligence officials and told them that Sanjay Gandhi was "very unhappy" with the reports One of the senior officials reportedly expressed his helplessness "Sir, we can't manufacture reports, can we?"

But once again the trusted intelligence men posted in the states were asked to send fresh assessments and some officers were sent

[6]As related to the author by an intelligence source

out from Delhi on reconnaissance ' missions But again the burden of their information was the same people were indignant, specially the Muslims And again Sanjay Gandhi was furious "You people don't go to the field as I do The entire country is solidly behind us "

More intelligence men were sent off to various states Within days came their report it was the most opportune time for elections

But Indira Gandhi still awaited clearance from her pundits A special panel of three top astrologers of the country was drawn up after long discussions at No 1 Safdarjang Road Since Yashpal Kapoor was the man who knew the creatures of the astral world as well as he knew the political underworld, he was assigned to contact the astrologers Kapoor met them separately, one in Delhi, one in Allahabad, and the third in Trivandrum Each of them made a careful study of the *kundalis* (birth charts) of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi and they came to the conclusion that an early election would be most "propitious "

The way for the elections cleared, Sanjay Gandhi and Bansi Lal tried to persuade Indira Gandhi that the top leaders of the opposition should not be released But she is believed to have argued that this would defeat one of the major purposes of the elections Even if they won hands down the world would say that it was a phoney victory And in any case what was the harm in releasing them? They were too down and out to make any differencee—all spent up forces

After Jagjivan Ram threw his bombshell and the great Youth Congress dreams lay shattered, one of Sanjay's cronies in Uttar Pradesh suggested that he should "requisition the services" of a Benares yogi Since he was told that the holy man would not stir out of Benares, Sanjay Gandhi sent a special emissary to him The yogi was reluctant to have anything to do with the business, but on great persuasion he is believed to have said that the "time is not good for the boy " When this was reported to Indira Gandhi, she got very perturbed and sent another emissary to Benares Under pressure, the yogi said he would try to do something about the boy's bad stars, but as it transpired later, the yogi had also been approached by some leaders of the opposition and he had assured them that he would use all his powers to help them in the "Indira Hatao" mission. The way the astrologers and holy

men are supposed to have behaved, it almost seemed they h joined in a conspiracy against the Godmother and her flock!

She had a *tilak* on her forehead when she entered the court roo of the Rae Bareli District Magistrate on 17 February It w exactly 11 30 A M, which her pundits had determined as the mo auspicious moment for filing her nomination She had reached t court compound about fifteen minutes earlier, but had remain sitting in her green Chevrolet a little away from the court room waiting for the right time

"She looks so tense!" remarked a reporter as Indira Gand entered the court room and sat in a chair next to the Distri Magistrate The arc-lights of cameramen and photographe showed the beads of perspiration on her carefully done-up fac "That's the same sari she wore for her *padayatra*," remarke another reporter, and she looked round, as though she had hear him Behind her chair stood Narayan Dutt Tewari, Om Meht and a beaming Yashpal Kapoor "That man has nine lives whispered somebody in the crowd "She can't fight an electio without him," he went on whispering He obviously mea Yashpal Kapoor

Indira Gandhi had taken a pen to sign the nomination paper but Kapoor had immediately come forward and whispered som thing to her She waited, while her "Hanuman" opened his famou briefcase and brought out a gold cap Parker He opened it with flourish, gave it a jerk to see if it was flowing properly, and the offered it to her Even as she was signing the nomination paper her shaggy bearded opponent pushed through the crowd yellin and shouting 'Let me get in, let me get in I am getting late Raj Narain's pundits too had given him the same "auspiciou time" How can it be auspicious for both, asked someone in th crowd and Raj Narain retorted "This time it is auspicious for me Let me in, I must greet her" But before he could push his wa through, Indira Gandhi had left the room amidst cries of "Ra Narain *Zindabad*' and "*Tanashahi Nahi Chalegi*" by his supporter gathered outside As Martin Woollacott of the *Guardian* had writte a few days earlier, democracy had returned to India with a bang

The fear of the previous 19 months was suddenly gone Even in remote villages, people were showing a different face Befor filing her nomination, Indira Gandhi had gone to her first electio

meeting in the constituency, at village Dasauti, on the border of her son's constituency, Amethi Sure enough, Sanjay Gandhi had entered the race After Jagjivan Ram had queered the pitch for the Congress, many had thought that Indira Gandhi would persuade her son to keep out of the elections That is one way she can still save the party from disaster, said people who believed that the son was the sole villain of the peace If she disowns him, she will win hands down, they said That had been the greatest bane of politicians, they thought they could go on fooling the people for ever But in any case, it was too much to hope that she would leave her son in the lurch It was for him that the elections were primarily meant The mother and the son were going to fight back together

At the same "auspicious moment" Sanjay Gandhi had filed his nomination at Sultanpur which had put Narayan Dutt Tewari in a great dilemma He had found it hard to decide whether to be with the mother or with the son at the auspicious moment Tewari had considered Sanjay's candidature from Amethi a personal victory, a victory over so many Chief Ministers of the country who had been vying with one another to persuade Sanjay to contest from their states "What do you think?" Tewari had asked one of his senior officers "Should I go to Rae Bareli with the Prime Minister or should I go to Sultanpur?" The officer had told him hesitantly that the official protocol demanded that he should go with the Prime Minister Tewari had thought for a while and then decided that the officer was perhaps right

A beautifully done up dais waited for the Prime Minister at Dasauti Hundreds of policemen lined the route and at the meeting ground district officials distributed a report on the "great strides" that Rae Bareli had taken in the past few years About two dozen Congressmen and women stood around with huge garlands in their hands There was everything and yet somehow it looked different from most Indira Gandhi meetings one had seen in the past There was no "Indira crowd" Barely three hundred villagers Acres of empty barricades stretched beyond the dais The local organizers were looking around anxiously but there were only a dozen or two villagers strolling down the dusty roads What had happened to the people of Dasauti and the neighbouring villages? Where had they disappeared? A burly Congressman of the area took the mike and began delivering an impassioned

speech on the "great and beloved leader under whom Rae Bareli will soon become as big and prosperous as Calcutta or Bombay" But after he had spoken for 20 minutes there were no more people than before Nor was there time The Prime Minister's motorcade had arrived

The garland-bearing Congressmen fell into a disciplined line to give her a guard of honour, but she rushed straight up the dais. Indira Gandhi looked around, frowned, and said something irritatedly to the lady MLA of Rae Bareli who had been bulldozed to victory in the fourth count in 1974 Indira Gandhi turned around and came to the head of the stairs and motioned to the party men still standing in a row. One by one they went up the stairs, offered their garlands, touched her feet, and descended The ritual over, she spoke for a minute and a half One could see that she was not going to waste her breath for a couple of hundred people, half of them below the voting age

The crowd was only slightly better at the second and third meetings in her constituency By then she was so perturbed over the poor turnouts that she asked Tewari "Why are the crowds so poor?" For a moment, Tewari fumbled for words and then said: "Er, the villagers seem to have gone for lunch" That seemed to reassure Indira Gandhi "O, I see," she said This great leader of the poor and downtrodden masses seemed to know even less about the people in whose name she ruled than her illustrious father At best, Nehru was a pseudo socialist, but Indira Gandhi was not even that She had few real convictions, and as her one time Press Adviser George Verghese said, "She has no consistent vision; everything is tactics" Like her son, Indira Gandhi was neither left nor right She herself had confessed to an American writer: "I don't really have a political philosophy I can't say I believe in any ism" If anything, Indira Gandhi was "slightly to the left of self-interest," as one British journalist put it

As the campaign progressed, it became clear that her spell had broken, even in her very own Rae Bareli Far from worshipping her, the villagers had turned even hostile at places Add to this the rivalries of the courtiers working for her in the constituency and the result was not difficult to foresee

There was quite a bunch of them Presiding over the campaign from his first-floor room in the central election office was Jagpat Dube, a smooth 40-year-old man, clad in silk, heavily dabbed

with cologne He claimed he had been the election agent of the Nehru family in five general elections Exuding confidence, he said it was only a question of working for a bigger margin of victory "We want Indira Gandhi to win by at least two and a half lakh votes this time!"

Dube had been studying at Allahabad University when he had first come in contact with the Nehru family He had then become the care taker of Anand Bhawan where he earned for himself the reputation of being a playboy But he was not one of those who tried to extend their activities beyond the house By mid-sixties his importance in the household had gone down, but he still remained a family retainer and was occasionally "rewarded" with such things as a membership of the khadi board or election agentship in Rae Bareli

Also presiding over the campaign was the one-time Nawab of Rae Bareli, Yashpal Kapoor, and it was only natural that he should have looked upon Jagpat Dube as an imposition on him The upset in the Allahabad High Court had put him in the doghouse and he never quite regained his former position at the court His relations with Sanjay Gandhi were none too warm, thanks to Dhawan who knew that he could not consolidate his own position at court unless Kapoor was elbowed out

During the Emergency, Yashpal Kapoor had gradually drifted to his own money-spinning operations, one of which was the chain of exhibitions on the 20 point programme Another lucrative operation was the central campaign committee of the Congress Kapoor had also started a so called national forum of journalists and netted quite a number of senior correspondents in this thinly veiled racket

By the time the Lok Sabha elections were announced, Dhawan had managed to turn Sanjay Gandhi so much against Kapoor that the boy started telling his mother that it would not be safe to send him to Rae Bareli Indira Gandhi summoned her old Muneemji, Umashankar Dixit, whom she had made Governor of Andhra Pradesh, for consultations When Yashpal learnt that he was being kept out of Rae Bareli, he went straight to Indira Gandhi and almost wept She was so moved by his protestations of faithfulness that she told him he would certainly go to Rae Bareli Kapoor thought he had won But in the meantime Dhawan and Sanjay had managed to persuade Indira Gandhi to send Jagpat Dube as the

Chief Election Agent This, they thought, would neutralize Yashpal Kapoor It was quite in line with Indira Gandhi s usual style of fostering the anarchy of rivalries around her From the outset of her career, this had been one of her most successful devices for her own tactical success It was because of these rivalries that she had remained the exclusive point of reference in the party But in the end this strategy was to recoil on herself It became one of the major factors of her defeat in Rae Bareli

Apart from Dube and Kapoor, there were other campaign managers at the local and the state levels Among them were Gaya Prasad Shukla, Chairman of the Rae Bareli Zila Parishad and S P Singh, the UP Transport Minister Overseeing the campaign was her faithful "Omji ' who jetted back and forth between Delhi and Lucknow all through the campaign At a rather late stage the rivalry between Jagpat Dube and Yashpal Kapoor was thought to be telling on the campaign and so Om Mehta suggested that an outsider be sent to Rae Bareli to supervise the polling and the counting operations For this, Om Mehta chose Makhanlal Fotedar, a man from his own state All of them operated from their own little ivory towers, and the upshot was total confusion

But till the last day none of them could see what they were heading for Some had their heads in the sand, others did not have the intelligence to see it Just a few days before the polling, Indira's Goebbels returned from a tour of Rae Bareli and announced perkily to pressmen at Lucknow "What to talk of a wave, I did not even see a Janata ripple anywhere in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar "

On the evening of 16 March, after the polling was over in many parts of the country, Jagpat Dube told a correspondent ' Do you know, I have just got very authoritative information that Bahuguna is badly losing in Lucknow Sheila Kaul is winning hands down "

' Is that so? ' said the correspondent ironically

' Believe me, it's from a very good source Chaudhuri Charan Singh is also gone!

About Rae Bareli, of course, Dube was cocksure ' It will be a thumping victory! Just wait and see "

By 5 P M on 20 March, Jagpat Dube looked as though he had been struck by palsy Yashpal Kapoor paced up and down in the anteroom of the District Magistrate's court Fotedar chain smoked his *India Kings* At 11 that morning he had been the picture

of confidence, now he was a bundle of nerves, his face ashen

A news agency man was getting frantic to get the first results of the counting By then the trend was known to all There was not a single table in any of the counting booths where Indira Gandhi was leading by even a single vote But there was no official announcement Jawans of the Border Security Force armed with sten-guns has taken position outside the counting booths, nobody knew why Tension was mounting One press correspondent rushed to Raj Narain to seek his help in getting an official announcement

He was going around the counting booths, now confident of victory but still tense When he heard the correspondent's apprehension that the results may not be announced, Raj Narain burst out "Who says? Blood will flow here if they withhold the results"

He rushed into the court room looking for the District Magistrate, Vinod Malhotra When he found him, he demanded "Why don't you let the people know the result of the first round?' Malhotra said he had just received instructions from Delhi to hold the results for some time 'But how can you do that?" asked Raj Narain, getting worked up "There is no provision for holding up results You can't have new rules for this constituency You have to announce it" Standing nearby was the Election Commission Observer, a quiet but firm man He told the Returning Officer that Raj Narain was right in saying that there was no provision to withhold the results This came as a relief to Malhotra who himself had been in favour of doing what was right but had been under constant pressure from Indira Gandhi's men to withhold the results Now that he had got the backing of the Election Commission man, he told the correspondents that he would immediately instruct his Assistant Returning Officers to give them the official results of the first round of counting

Raj Narain had already established a big lead over Indira Gandhi The BSF officers were whispering to one another, but you could see that they were far from unhappy at the unexpected turn of events But they themselves seemed as apprehensive about the part they might be called upon to play as many others were

It was around ten in the night that the real drama began Frantic telephone calls started coming every five minutes from No 1 Safdarjang Road, New Delhi, asking for the Returning Officer At one point, Malhotra thought it wiser to leave the place for a while "Don't tell them where I am," he told his colleagues

and retired to an adjacent room But he could not be away all the time Om Mehta was telephoning every five minutes or so Fotedar was rushing from one counting booth to another, his face getting paler every time fresh results came in

With no earthly hope of making up left, Fotedar came up with a petition asking for a repoll in the constituency "How can this be done now?" was the first reaction of the courageous Returning Officer Perhaps no other officer in the country had a more difficult job that day than Malhotra He decided to hold court formally and hear what Fotedar's lawyer had to say The polling in the constituency, the lawyer pleaded, had been a "big fraud" He alleged that outsiders had poured into the constituency in big number and voted for the Janata Party

Malhotra was obviously not convinced, but he seemed to be looking for a legal point to reject the petition Once again the Election Commission Observer, who had kept his cool through the tensest hours of the day, came to the Returning Officer's aid "With your permission, could I say something?" Malhotra was only too happy about this timely intervention "Oh yes, please go on," he said

The Observer asked the petitioner if he could point out the provision of the Election Commission rules under which he was asking for a repoll at this stage This threw Fotedar and his lawyer into a flutter They started rifling through the Election Commission manual frenziedly, but could find nothing to back up their case Malhotra had got the clue, and he now stuck to it "I give you fifteen minutes to substantiate your case," he told Fotedar

Thousands of people had gathered round the court, determined not to allow any fishy business Raj Narain tried to pacify his irate followers "Don't worry, they can do nothing now" But in Delhi, frantic efforts were still on Indira Gandhi herself was not even informed of her own position until about 8 P M, but Om Mehta and Dhawan were making all possible attempts to get the Rae Bareli counting stopped At one stage, Om Mehta telephoned the Chief Election Commissioner But T Swaminathan is believed to have told him that he could not take any action without a report from the Returning Officer As far as he knew the counting had been perfectly in order and there was no cause for action

Eleven years ago Indira Gandhi had taken the reins of government with the promise to be a "worthy servant of this great people" She had risen to great heights, but she could not keep herself there, because her "greatness" was a mere facade, a build up It lacked authenticity Even mediocre men have made successful rulers with sincerity of purpose, but Indira Gandhi lacked even that She raised hopes which she had no intention of fulfilling Her government was as schizophrenic as herself, it sought to draw its power from the poor and the downtrodden and serve the interests of the exploiters—of her own class

In the years that she ruled, she turned all concepts upside down, perverted all standards of judgment Spider-like, she went on weaving a huge web of corruption around her and in a sense herself became its greatest victim Drunk with power and success, she forgot that power divorced from morality was a sure road to disaster She had lasted as long as she did mainly because of the lack of political sense and judgment on the part of millions of dissatisfied, embittered individuals who submitted themselves to the redeemer cult that was systematically developed around her person Once the mask was off, she fell headlong in the eyes of the people Her real fall came long before the defeat in Rae Bareli or even the defeat in the Allahabad High Court She fell the day she was found out

The game was up Amethi too had been lost Late that evening, Sanjay Gandhi had driven from Sultanpur to Lucknow, and arrived at Tewari's house looking a wreck "How is mummy?" he had asked, and was told she was trailing He was stunned into silence

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